

Count Benckendorff

HALF A
LIFE

THE REMINISCENCES
OF A RUSSIAN GENTLEMAN

Richards Press

Count Benckendorff, D.S.O., was born in 1880. Former Commander in the Russian Imperial Navy and Assistant Chief of General Staff, Red Navy, he left Russia in 1924 and has since lived in England. His father was Russian Ambassador in London from 1900 to 1917.

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HALF A LIFE



COUNT CONSTANTINE BENCKENDORFF D.S.O.
from the portrait by Anthony Devas A.R.A.

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*The Reminiscences of a
Russian Gentleman*

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FOR
CONSTANTINE
MY GRANDSON AND NAMESAKE

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CHAPTER I

CHILDHOOD AND EARLY YEARS

IN August, 1924, I stood on the decks of a Baltic steamer bound from Libau, via the Kiel Canal, for London. I did not think then that I had turned my back on Russia definitely, because the ties that bound me were still very strong and very much alive, and whatever had occurred within the last six years had actually reinforced those links.

I shall attempt to give an account of that part of my life spent in my old country during the half-century preceding and including the great upheaval, of which the results are not in sight even now. Groping in the folds of my memory I find that whereas many facts, dates and even their sequence, have gone, what I remember should be sufficient to give a picture of the general foundation upon which my world rested and of the chief causes, as I saw them, that brought about the advent of a completely different social structure, and an appreciation of the effects of this change during its earliest period. For all my conscious life I had become more and more convinced that Russia was on the eve of a profound change, and a change that was, irrespective of its immediate form, a direct consequence of its past.

The following pages will therefore represent not so much a chronicle as an appreciation of what was experienced, seen through the eyes of childhood, youth and early manhood, and

thereby contributing, perhaps, to the better understanding of events that had and will have, such a tremendous, if not decisive, influence on the lives of many generations all over the world.

The story-teller is always tempted to give undue prominence to material which rewards the efforts spent on it. I would therefore be grateful to my readers if, noticing such a disproportion in my tale, they ascribe it to the cause just mentioned, and not to propaganda in one sense or the other. I am as far removed as anyone can possibly be from trying to penetrate the curtains, be they of iron or of news sheets, which obscure the view of the contemporary world on everything that matters.

My father, Count Alexander Benckendorff, born in 1849, and connected with the Diplomatic service from his early youth, in 1879 married Countess Sophie Shuvalov, one of the five daughters of Count Peter Shuvalov. Under the prevailing attitude of the Liberal wing of the Russian aristocracy, the young married couple, who up till then had had but slight knowledge of country life proper, decided to retire to the country to manage my father's estate, and raise a family. This property, Sosnofka, in the Province of Tambov, about 300 miles south-east of Moscow, was—from a European point of view—in the middle of Nowhere. In 1880 however, it was forcibly suggested to him by the Foreign Office that use could be made of his services in Vienna, where, through his mother—a Princess Cröy—he already had many valuable connections. And to Vienna he went, as third Secretary, to remain for fifteen years, ending, as Chancellor. But his wife, my mother, then and forever afterwards, remained profoundly devoted to country life, in the most literal sense of the word; centred, of course, on Sosnofka, which consequently became the lodestar of our immediate family. This created a conflict of interests, which was solved as follows: their life was to be divided between the sum-

mer at Sosnofka, and the winter abroad. But in practice, as time went on my father became much too busy to spend more than two months of the year in Russia.

There was yet another division of our time, but this only in regard to our life abroad. My maternal grandfather, Count Peter Shuvalov,¹ was one of those self-exiled Russian noblemen, who, as *Maréchal de Noblesse* in Petersburg, had not seen eye to eye with his Sovereign, Emperor Alexander II, on the great reform measure of the '60s—the Liberation of the Serfs. Not, it must be borne in mind, as a diehard Conservative, but as a Liberal, or even Radical, aristocrat, whose view was: "before you liberate the serfs, you should liberate *US*." Meanwhile, of his own accord, he had liberated, before any reform measure, about 100,000 of his own serfs. His family, which consisted of a son and five daughters, was brought up to share his views, and married, all except one, members of the leading families of Petersburg society. They helped to form the Liberal section of the late nineteenth century ruling aristocracy, and played an important part in political life.

This exile of Count Shuvalov's consisted in spending the winter abroad and the summer on his magnificent estate near Kiev, but not, under any circumstances, going near Petersburg or the Court. My grandmother, a Narishkin,² an extremely beautiful, fascinating and self-willed personage, having had a taste of Napoleon III and Empress Eugénie's court at Paris, insisted on France, or at least the Swiss Romande, as her permanent residence abroad. Count Shuvalov, who had a strong aversion to metropolitan life, found a compromise in installing

¹A cousin of the special envoy at the Berlin Congress: the family had joined the ranks of the ruling aristocracy since one of the Shuvalovs had been a lover of Catherine II's.

²The family of Narishkin, on the strength of Peter the Great's mother being née Narishkin, never condescended to accept a title from the Romanoffs.

his establishment, first at Vevey, and finally, at the Villa Monticello, in the foothills behind Nice. Thus my mother's six months "abroad" were again divided between Vienna and Monticello, and this mode of life is the reason I was trilingual from earliest youth—Russian, French and German.

In Vienna the position was this. My paternal grandmother, the Cröy, was a member of one of those *mediatisée* dynasties of the innumerable tiny principalities which were part of the Holy Roman Empire of the German tongue, done away with at the Vienna Congress. The members of such families, even before 1814, took service under any monarch, and a branch of Cröys had been for generations established in Austria under the Hapsburgs, as soldiers, administrators and landowners. The fact of this connection alone gave my father an immediate and unquestioned entry into Austro-Hungarian ruling society: the Austrians didn't lose by this either, in view of my mother's political background in Russia. Such influential family groups, which in those days existed in every country, were *au courant* with absolutely everything that would now be considered confidential information, or even "state secrets," and all such questions were freely discussed amongst them as a matter of course.

In Vienna we lived at Herrengasse VI, in the Innere Stadt, between the Hofburg and the Graben, in two large flats, both on the second floor, connecting across the main stairway. The one on the left housed my parents and the three reception rooms; the other was for children, nannies, governesses, etc. But this separation of flats did not in any way preclude constant contact between us and our parents. We could always go across, and make sudden irruptions even into the drawing-room on my mother's "day," and from early times the midday meal was taken together. We had comparatively few servants, but they never changed, and two of them had been inherited from my grandparents. "Not before the servants" didn't exist at all; if my parents ever wished to keep

something to themselves, broken English was used indiscriminately with regard to children and servants.

Daily life in Vienna for the very young was without special attraction. At home, lessons, in the afternoons walks in the Prater, not farther than the Zweite Café. There coffee and admirable concerts by the military bands, finishing by a grandiose and excellently played potpourri. At the height of winter a very welcome diversion offered—skating on the big rink below the Kunsthistorisches Museum. I well remember the hideous disappointment when, reaching the Ring through the Alte Stadt on a doubtful day, no flag was flying on the rink, and one morosely turned left across the river Wien, to trail to the Prater once more. In those days nothing more than dance tunes, and especially café-concert ditties, was admitted by us children as music; a taste we could amply indulge in Vienna. However, sometimes we were brought nearer to higher forms of music; such as being dragged, by our father, to listen to Anton Rubenstein in the lavatory of our apartment, which was contiguous to the platform of the Bösendorfer Saal, then situated in the courtyard of Herrengasse VI.

But really it is not Vienna which I remember best, but the Cröy property in Lower Austria; Buchberg, by Gars. This was a small medieval castle, complete with keep and drawbridge, built on a steep rock, on the hillside overlooking the River Kemp, into which you could drop out of the drawing-room window. This smallish estate, somewhere about 2,000 acres, mostly forest, was inhabited by Prince Alexander Cröy, a younger brother of my grandmother, and his large family of sons and daughters, who, in spite of being technically “uncles and aunts” were only a few years older than us.

During the long periods spent visiting Buchberg to be out with a gun was what mainly concerned us and the Cröy boys. The place being small there were none of those monumental battues which took place on the large estates in Austria and

Germany. You were allowed to go out after roebuck and small game at suitable times of the year, and your best friends were the keepers, who, on that kind of estate, were foresters and land agents too. Nevertheless, all this shooting, though informal by some standards, was surrounded by a maze of rules and customs, and had its own sporting language. For instance, one didn't dare to go out shooting without informing the relevant keeper, who would be mortally offended at losing an opportunity of giving advice (rarely followed). The language was complicated by such conventions that blood (*blut*) of game could only be referred to as sweat (*schweiss*) and legs as "*Laüfers*". The breaking of these codes, either by word or deed, loomed very large, especially as it was rigidly supported by the entire establishment, including servants. And I well remember the looks, the murmurs and the atmosphere which surrounded me on that black day, when I had, by mistake, shot a doe.

Sometime during the winter, a summons would come from Monticello and be received with groans, which in time became more and more formal, from my father, bitterly complaining at being left high and dry, in the middle of the Vienna season by my mother being torn away to go and nurse her father and bad tempered mother in the south of France.

Monticello was a property of about twenty acres, of which ten were pastures and the rest olive terraces and orange groves—the oranges being mostly bitter. This my grandmother insisted upon, to prevent the ravages of her various grandchildren, on the grounds that the whole point of an ornamental grove was lost without a full crop studding the trees. There were two houses; an original eighteenth century Italianate villa, and, joined to it by a covered passage, a modern indifferent-looking three-storied house, filled with a remarkable art collection. I suspect that my grandfather's self-exile from political life was largely based on his passion for collecting

pictures, furniture and so on, for which he was admirably endowed with discernment and taste, and for which he wanted plenty of time.

In the middle of spring, after another minor domestic wrangle about the exact date, my mother, accompanied by us, with her maid and our nannie, tutor or governess, took the Nord Express to Moscow. This journey took two nights and a day, and on arrival in Moscow we went straight to the Hotel Dresden, where we invariably ate hazel-hen in sour cream and pickled cucumbers, and on the evening of the next day started for Sosnofka. About midday the next day Riajsk was reached—a big junction with one of the best railway restaurants in the world. There an elaborate and large meal was consumed, served in a public dining-room on silver plate, which all the Russian railways used in those days. Leaving Riajsk we came next to the small station of Kouliki in the early afternoon, where our carriages were waiting to take us to Sosnofka itself. These carriages consisted of an open landau, pulled by four horses abreast, for my mother and us, and two smaller carriages, troikas, in the Russian style, for the servants and luggage respectively. This overland journey took, in dry weather, about two-and-a-half hours at a brisk trot; if it had been wet for some time, the unmetalled roads—dubbed later by visiting Englishmen as “so-called” roads—were in such a state that it took anything up to three-and-a-half hours. A continuous flow of conversation between my mother and the head coachman Michael, all about crops, at that time of the year just beginning to show their future possibilities, the garden, and rather malicious gossip about the staff, both of the house and the estate, punctuated the whole journey. Michael was an old retainer, and had been, with one or two others, our serf before the Liberation.

At last, half-way down the hill, and with an oak-grove flanking it, the northern end of Sosnofka village appeared. The first thing one saw was a factory chimney stack on the left, the only

one for miles around; this factory, which we later bought, was one of the few remains of Peter the Great's activities. It had been producing iron-oxide till 1890, for which the raw material was surface-mined, both at Sosnofka and in the region. In the days of serfdom, the community settled around near the factory had been attached to it, and even now the male members were distinguishable by a permanent red tinge on their face and hands. A little later appeared the barns and granaries, stables and dairies, of our home farm; and a little later still, the kitchen building. Continuing on the main road we passed the fronts of the two houses, which stood back about three hundred yards, and at the bottom of the slope was our main gate into which we turned to arrive home by a longish drive, which had obviously been freshly sanded for the occasion. In front of the main door all the domestic staff were assembled to greet us and the time being late, tea was immediately served.

The estate of Sosnofka was granted to the Benckendorffs in about 1775. As the original family estate was at Fäll, in Estonia, Sosnofka was never inhabited by them, and especially during my father's long minority, was let to various people. Fäll was eventually inherited by Princess Volkonsky, the eldest daughter of the first Count Benckendorff, the title and central Russian lands passing to his nephew, my grandfather, who married the Cröy. All his connections were abroad, especially after he had been wounded in the Caucasian fighting in 1849, and had gone, a semi-invalid, as Envoy to Würtemberg: So, when, on marriage, the urge to establish a country home seized my parents, Sosnofka was the only choice.

The place itself consisted of two two-storied houses, standing alongside, about 15 yards apart, in a small park. This was well



DINNER, SOSNOFKA 1890

designed on the gentle slopes of a valley, with a stream at the bottom, ending in a pond. One of the houses was built entirely of timber, with only the foundations and cellars of brick; it was covered with boards and, except for the window frames, was tinted with that dark red paint which was the product of the village factory, and the roof was in flat sheet iron, also painted red. It probably dated back to either the end of the eighteenth century, or the beginning of the nineteenth. The other house was of brick, painted white, E-shaped, and with square brick columns picked out in bluish-grey; it was older and dated back to the days of the Empress Elisabeth—the middle 1750's. Up to 1887 it was occupied by our land agent and his numerous family; but when we bought the factory they migrated to the manager's house, and my brother and I, together with our tutor, were transferred to it.

One of the characteristics of a timber house is that the inside can be altered quite safely and with comparatively little effort. On the other hand, the white house, after the agent had left it, was due for a fundamental overhaul. All this kind of work, as well as the constant improvement and maintenance of the gardens, formed for my mother the most essential basis and *raison d'être* of country life. What my mother understood by this work was not merely redecorating, but reshaping the interiors, and, in the case of the white house, rebuilding and redesigning the whole inside. Also the designing and making, out of local material, helped by a faithful band of followers, of all the panelling and some furniture. For instance, my mother would take a genuine eighteenth century chair, and design armchairs, tables, etc., to match it, which would be made by the followers and painted by herself. Our map and chart racks were designed by her and made of brown and white apple wood which was available after part of the old orchard was cut down. The ground floor of the timber house—reception rooms and offices—was entirely reshaped twice before I was fifteen.

One really never knew where one was, as all the work was done during the winter eclipse—secret plans were laid and the followers carefully instructed down to the last detail, with many notes and designs left for them.

The chief follower was, curiously enough, our major-domo, Alexander Stepanovich Sboiloff. He was not a Sosnofka man, but had been collected as a footman, during the short Petersburg season of my parents' second year of marriage, and was a native of Petersburg, who had done his military service in the Footguards. The Imperial theatres employed guardsmen as "extras," both as "walkers on" and behind the scenes, and through this Alexander became extremely fond of the theatre and all its arts, and for the rest of his life could recite reams from the entire repertoire. But for my mother what was important was that he had become a very good stage carpenter too. Under him, apart from the estate carpenters and artisans, was Kornyevev, a very remarkable joiner, a mill carpenter by trade. These mill carpenters, all over Russia, were really superb craftsmen, and so they had to be, because all the wind and watermill machinery, as well as agricultural machinery was their responsibility, and was made entirely of wood, with very little iron. In the case of Korneef wood carving was added to his accomplishments, and he brought to all work done for my mother the most passionate and devoted interest. M. Laroche, the old French cook, a skilful carver and gilder, was also an important figure, though he could only function in the summer months.

After the preliminary and maliciously gossipy report from the coachman which had already put my mother into a very bad temper, the first week at Sosnofka was spent in a chain of continuous major and minor explosions, as Mama gradually found out that *everything* she had ordered the previous autumn had gone wrong. As the others were not immediately to hand, the brunt of all this was stoically, but volubly, borne by Alexander Stepanovich. Not that others didn't suffer too in this

first week—everybody kept away from Mama, storming about with her two pairs of spectacles both on her forehead. There was another reason too why my brother and I found the first week intolerable; all these so called improvements, whether fundamental changes, or minor re-adjustments, seemed to alter the whole character of the place, and make it not worth living in any more. This was especially so when the changes took place in our respective apartments in the white house, as the plans had been secretly laid, and the faithful followers certainly never gave anything away beforehand.

The general service of the houses was provided by two housemen and a married kitchen couple to assist M. Laroche, with a varied number of village girls as housemaids. Whilst Alexander Stepanovich lived in his own house on the estate, all the rest of the staff came in daily, and lived, if they were local people in their own houses in the village, or if not, which was seldom, in housing provided on the estate. Of course, my mother's maid and father's valet lived in, as did Martha Ivanovna Doulina, our Russian nannie, who continued afterwards as second housekeeper, and so did Masha, an old and trusted housemaid. But for us boys the most important person was a keeper, or ranger, Vassilly Milantovich Teterin. He was, as it were, the domestic "keeper", in charge of the dogs and the gun-room, and his work was entirely separate from the forest rangers, who came under the Forester.

The grounds were laid out in avenues, some of lilac, and some of well-grown lime trees; one of the more interesting features was a single, squat, and large chestnut tree at the junction of the avenues, encircled with wooden benches. There was nothing very remarkable about this design, but one could easily imagine the tribulations of Tatiana and Eugene Onegin taking place in just such surroundings. An Estonian, Peter Ivanovich, who communicated with the locals in broken Russian, and with my mother in a mixture of this and broken

Baltic German, was in charge of it all. Under his command were two to three assistant gardeners, and a swarm of about fifteen village girls, working for their dowries, and consequently constantly changing. He was a very good gardener and had, at his disposal, a hothouse and quite extensive glasshouse with peaches, apricots and egg plums; also an enormous kitchen garden and an apple orchard of roughly 25 acres. This side he ran extremely well with hardly any interference from my mother. But the flower and rock gardens were treated in exactly the same way as the houses, and subjected to constant and most spectacular changes, both in their design and in the stock the permanent and annual beds contained. So the position of Peter Ivanovich was no less nerve racking than that of Alexander Stepanovich, but in this field, however, no one could criticise the results of the collaboration.

There seem to me two approaches to gardening. In one you grow things to achieve a certain visual result; in the other you grow plants for the interest of growing them, that is to say the visual effect is entirely subordinated to the well-being of the plants. My mother always contended that in the judicial combination of both approaches lay the secret of success, and, in a way, at least around the house, the results of her gardening approached her ideal.

The red house had a two-storied balcony on the south, and a large open stone terrace on the east side. The first overlooked, against a background of rough lawn studded with oak, lime, birch and small shrubberies, a very formal double quadrangle of annuals. This had a small sundial in the middle and was separated by a low lilac bush from a small rose garden, and around all these went two winding paths, lined with *aureum* lilies and other rare bulbs, the whole giving the impression of extreme artificiality; in her efforts to produce this effect my mother always bitterly regretted that box hedges were impossible in the climate. Around the south-east corner of the

house lay a rockery, mainly filled with Caucasian wild azaleas and dwarf rhododendrons from the same part of the world, with gentian for later flowering.

On the terrace, which looked down the open ground to the hedge on the main road, and was flanked by two colossal lime trees, were set tubs with orange trees from Monticello. But the main effect was produced in late July and August when, from boxes along the walls the indian convolvulus (*Ippomea*) every year covered the whole house, up to the roof, with the sky-blue sheen of its flowers. The flower gardens here, on the same plans as before, attracted the more attention as there was no particular distant view. At the front of the house was a round drive with peony beds on a rough lawn, against the background of the avenues of the main grounds.

About two hundred yards up the hill towards the farm the stables were situated, with the main water tank and pump, in the middle of the paved yard. There were two wings with twelve stalls for the horses, joined by the coach house and saddlery. About eight carriage horses and four riding horses were kept, and several Kirghisian ponies, used indiscriminately for riding and driving. The head coachman, Michael Avdeevich, a staunch diehard, had under him, as well as a varying number of stable hands and lads, the second coachman Frol Tarrasovich Vasilkoff, a strong social revolutionary by conviction, silent, determined and extremely loyal. The latter hated his superior, both as a man and as a revolutionary. Incidentally all the problems of land and land ownership were first brought to my attention by Frol's short, pungent, but extraordinarily pertinent remarks, solicited or not, which accompanied our long drives together. We were all taught to ride and drive from earliest years; the first lessons on a lounge by putting us on bareback until we fell off, and mercilessly putting us back again, in spite of our howls, so that in the end the saddle came as a relief and riding a natural means of transportation.

But on the whole we drove. There were carriages of various designs and a number of light wicker carts called *teleshki*, light carriages which could seat a driver and two more, with a couple of not too large dogs to make a really tight fit, and of these, three or four, in various states of disrepair, were kept in the coach house. This type was used by everyone in our part of Russia, and was pulled by either one horse, one horse and a side horse, or a *troika*, depending on the distance or speed required. In practice, whenever one wanted to go somewhere, the following happened. One mentioned to the indoor staff that either one, two or three horses would be wanted, and thereupon one of the office men ran half the distance up to the stables, and shouted the order: sometimes even a housemaid was sent, but this the stable felt to be slightly derogatory. Vocal acknowledgement having been received, in five to ten minutes the vehicle appeared before the main door; the order always mentioned if a coachman was needed, because very often we drove ourselves, but sometimes a man had to come to look after the horses on arrival. When the carriages went out, however, especially with Michael Avdeevich up, a much more elaborate ceremonial was observed and ample notice given. In winter sledges were used, and in these the same categories existed; big coach-built sledges corresponding to the carriages, and little light ones taking the place of the *teleshki*—these were exactly like the ordinary peasant sledges, with seats and back rests added.

For us boys, the summer at Sosnofka consisted of two periods; before and after St. Peter's Day, 29th June, old style. For on that day, in Russia, the shooting season opened for wild duck and snipe. Up to the 29th we spent our free time fishing, swimming, riding and mildly playing tennis. As we had no fly fishing, the fishing itself was of the most primitive kind; perch and *sudak* being very good to eat were the only ones we tried for. Crayfishing was in a way more sporting; the

method we enjoyed most was getting into the river, and finding the hole in the bank where the crayfish lived. The arm was put in, often right up to the shoulder, till the crayfish got hold of your finger; then you slowly pulled it out and jerked it on to the bank. If the crayfish was large this could be very painful, and so the main haul was collected in net traps set with meat bait. We often cooked them in kettles over a bonfire and ate them then and there.

After the 29th not one of these pastimes was considered at all, except occasionally for guests from abroad; the gun came into its own. On our own river meadows, as well as very extensive ones on the river at Zna, about ten miles away, there were old water courses, small lakes and bogs, extremely well stocked with snipe, double snipe, jack snipe and of course, wild duck such as mallard, teal and quite a number of other species. We went nearly every day after these, walking up and with dogs, and fighting, both at evening and dawn. Later in July and August a few black game and partridge, and in September woodcock, were added, but waterfowl always predominated in the bag.

I well remember the best day's shooting in my life, when I was about 28 years old. It was a very, very hot day at the end of July, with not a cloud in the sky, and the sun already blazing hot, when I started from home at six o'clock in the morning, to arrive at eight at the water meadows of the village of Semikeno, about ten miles from Sosnofka. The enormous expanse, about half a mile broad, of those meadows, by that time looking brownish against the fully grown dark green belt of Crown forests,¹ their flatness interrupted only by an occasional sandy dune, sparsely covered with rough grass, and bisected by the winding silver of the river course, lined with

¹This belt of Crown forest, 20-30 miles broad, even more in places, stretched from Tambov right up to Nizhni Novgorod, and was the old-established outer forest barrier against the Tartar invasions.

rushes, stretched before me. I had with me two perfectly trained setters of my brother's, and Vassilly in charge of one of our mongrel retrievers. We crossed the river, made our camp at the edge of the forest and started off on double snipe on the higher ground, and towards midday we approached one of the sandhills on the far side of which one of the snipe bogs lay. It was in two parts, one an emerald green treacherous bog, the other nearly dry, but still with a little water, and covered with hillocks of rough grass and weeds. Around it the evil smelling edge of mud was stirred up by the cattle who occasionally came to drink there, and this formed, as everyone knows, an ideal feeding ground for snipe. As I and Vassilly approached it, the sun being hotter than ever, we saw both dogs, who had been working beautifully at some distance, gradually slow down as if not quite prepared for what was ahead of them. And suddenly on the edge of the green sward the bitch lay flat down and threw her head aside, and a hundred yards away the dog sat down on his haunches looking at her. I quietly walked forward; and suddenly the snipe began to flush and, was it because it was so hot, and they were lazy, that instead of getting up in numbers, they did so singly and in pairs, for without moving from the spot I shot three right and lefts and one single bird, hearing Vassilly, about ten yards back, muttering "one . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . five . . . six . . . seven," and the biggest day in my life had started. Towards four o'clock I had shot seventy-six snipe, also twelve double snipe and a few teal, and my shoulder was bruised black and blue so that I could go on no longer.

This of course was quite a memorable day, but going out on one's own meadows we could always count easily on ten to twenty wisp of snipe or double snipe, and duck-flighting could produce very considerable bags too. Both the black game and partridge were always walked up with dogs, of which we had quite a number, retrievers and a mongrel breed of our own.

This breed was a mixture of griffon and the waterspaniel bitch Talma, which was distinguished by webbed feet, and produced a succession of ugly but extremely efficient dogs with wonderful noses and indefatigable in water or bog.

As a result of all these shooting activities supper, our evening meal, being set for 7.30, hardly ever started before 9, on our return from the bogs wet, muddy and tired out. Sometimes when we happened to be very late my mother would get anxious and the order went out to the stables to send a man on horseback with a light—*l'homme à la lanterne*, as he was known in our domestic jargon—to meet us and help if necessary. The order was of course obeyed, but as nobody ever knew from where we were returning, he just went out past the house at an audible gallop, and stayed calmly waiting for our arrival on the bridge of the dam of the pond about three hundred yards from the main gate, a place which we could not miss wherever we came from. Much later, when grown up, we revealed this secret to my mother, but she nevertheless continued on occasion to send *l'homme à la lanterne*.

One of the reasons why, as adolescents and young men, we were so very late occasionally, could be embarrassing, as sometimes we spent part of the evening at those curious boys and girls assemblies which were common to the life of the peasantry in our parts, and to which we had access through our garden girls. The house of a middle-aged widow would be open evenings to local boys and girls for a minute (2 *kopeks*) entrance fee—tea money shared by both sexes. Singing, flirtatious conversation, very little drinking—out of flasks—and a little cuddling outside were the main features of these functions, which often lasted beyond midnight. They flourished mainly in winter, when the young peasantry after sundown had all their time on their hands, but they went on, in a much lesser degree in summer too; even at harvest time, in spite of the fact that everyone had to be up and doing at dawn.

These gatherings, although marriages were mostly by parental pre-arrangement, still helped the young people to sort themselves out in that sense. A curious thing in our part of Russia was the fact that the value of virginity as an essential precondition to marriage varied from village to village almost in the extreme. A climax to the evening behind the barn was taken for granted in some villages, and in others—unthinkable. The rest were in between. Roughly speaking, in talking about an attractive girl it was enough to mention her village to determine the degree of her accessibility.

But all this is neither here nor there and really belongs to the first six weeks of the shooting season. After that, with the arrival of my father for his main holiday, things of course became more formal. He, though fond of shooting, and a very good all round sportsman, did, nevertheless, avoid the rougher kinds of expeditions, and the shoots he took part in were more organised especially as by September we had a proper shoot every week, where hares, woodcock, black game and foxes made up the bag. These shoots happened on a Sunday, when everybody was free to beat, and the beaters, more or less always the same twenty to thirty village men, who were themselves enthusiastic sportsmen, would have cruelly resented any other day being chosen.

The other guns were sometimes an occasional guest, but mostly people like the local doctor, our beloved schoolmaster Ramsin, the insurance agent, M. Viatkin, and various locals. Maurice Baring, who met my parents in Copenhagen, where they went from Vienna in 1895, became instantly part of our family. He made Sosnofka for years to come a sort of second home and was from the beginning included in all our sporting activities. I must confess, though, that he never became very proficient with a gun, and any horse he was astride of instantly ran away into space.

Apart from fishing and shooting, our time was largely spent

on the Home Farm. As boys, especially before we were allowed to handle a gun, we quite often used to take over the duties of village boys who worked on the farms. These included, for instance, attending the oxen and horse teams for ploughing, dragging straw from the thresher in a sling on horseback, and later, using the scythe both on the meadows and fields, and putting a hand to the ploughs ourselves. There was much other such work, and on the whole the result was that we did know what was going on, and farming, in all its aspects, was so intimately linked with the whole tenor of life that it formed the unescapable continuo permeating our whole existence.

All the preceding, were the pleasures of our leisure at Sosnofka, as seen through the eyes of a seven to fifteen-year old. But although much time was allotted to them they were not allowed in any way to interfere with our lessons.

The first lessons, and they started at about the age of five, were provided, and in the summer only, by a couple, Constantine Phillipovich Ramsin and his wife, Praskovia Ivanovna. What happened in winter, either in Vienna or Monticello, at this early stage, I simply don't remember. The Ramsins were the teachers at the local *Zemstvo*¹ school—apart from church schools the only one established in those early years in Sosnofka. Constantine Phillipovich, the son of a lay reader from the neighbouring province of Penza, and a graduate of a teachers' college, was characteristic of the average village schoolmaster of the time in the employ of the local councils. An extremely efficient teacher and rather strict disciplinarian he was entirely devoted to his duties both towards his pupils and their parents. Although of clerical stock, he was a peasant born

¹County Council.

and bred, as the majority of Russian rural clergy were, and thus he was able to adjust the conflicting interests of time spent on education by the young peasantry and the need of their parents for their labour. This gave him an advantageous standing amongst the elders of the village and his opinions always carried weight with the rural council, even in matters not directly connected with the school.

His wife, on the other hand, was exceptional in every way. At some time in the late nineteenth century, after the Liberation of the Serfs, and when the great "back to the land and the people" movement started, the first educational establishment of university standing for women was founded, against strenuous official opposition: this was called the *Bestouzhev Courses*, and gave a full humanitarian education for young women. Especially in the first years of this foundation its output provided a flow of exceptionally highly educated and cultured young women, from all classes, imbued with a passionate determination to devote their lives to the enlightenment of the peasantry. Praskovia Ivanovna, a graduate of this course, the daughter of an Army padre, the winner of the George Cross¹ in the Turkish campaign, who ended his days at Sosnofka, married Constantine Phillipovich, who was of an entirely different cultural level, and became the second schoolmistress of Sosnofka school, and thereafter her life was spent in teaching small children. She herself gave birth to three children, who all became our intimates, and in so doing became a partial cripple with a strong limp.

She was a small woman with a very quiet voice and managed to infuse her lessons with a sort of extra meaning which broadened children's vision. There she was, a second mistress in a rural school, a woman of the highest imaginable cultural standing, who entirely subordinated this to what, after all, was

¹The equivalent of the Victoria Cross.

a much lower level, and did so consciously, to avoid the inescapable barrier which always arises between the educated minority and the mass. And gradually this attitude began to tell, first with regard to her husband and then on her whole environment. She became in a sense the prime mover of all her husband's activities and the foundation of his standing in the village community. It was the same for us, her special pupils—she gradually gave us the intimate appreciation of things humane, and especially rural, by which there was no better way to come. Long after lessons with her had ceased, in fact all through my life in Russia, I, from time to time, used to put my problems before her, and was always sure to get not only an interesting, but also a stimulating answer.

The Ramsins, between them, gave us the elementary education provided in those days in Russian village schools, which was about the same as English children get in the first four years of schooling in this country.

At about seven or eight years old we were taken in hand by Herr Berg, a young man of twenty-six, a Balt from Riga, bilingual in Russian and German. He was of secondary school education, a good teacher and managed to get us through the lower half of the Russian secondary school standard. He lived with us both in Russia and abroad, and had an amiable disposition, but as his natural intelligence was not of a very high order, was always in the background, and lagging behind, not quite being able to cope with the tempo of our family life. He stayed with us till I went to the University, but later on his main teaching activities were taken over by two Russian undergraduates, one a mathematician, and the other a classical scholar, who came to Sosnofka during the long summer vacation. Herr Berg himself ended up as a bookkeeper at Siemens branch in Petersburg, having married a governess of our cousins, the Bobrinskis. She had occupied the same position with them as he had with us, with the difference that Herr Berg was of a

rather phlegmatic temperament, and she, being a Russian, the exact opposite.

As I said earlier, in 1895 my parents moved to Copenhagen when my father became Russian Minister to the Danish Court, and I moved there too for another two years. My brother had been sent to the Corps des Pages, a boarding school, the Russian equivalent of St. Cyr, and thereafter only appeared in the family for the summer holidays at Sosnofka.

From my point of view the main event of our Copenhagen life was that there we discovered Maurice Baring, then an honorary attaché at the British Legation, and he discovered us. This in turn led to the discovery of England; previously my parents had had no English friends at all, and for one reason and another had never been in close touch with any of the staff of the British Embassy in Vienna. One of the results was that Maurice introduced to my mother's drawing room many English people *en passage* through Copenhagen, amongst them Ethel Smyth, so that a number of interesting encounters took place there which bore fruit five years later when my father was appointed Ambassador to the Court of St. James.

There is no doubt that Ethel Smyth's passionate devotion to her art, which she not only did not hide but expressed by nearly every word she said, and in fact by her whole being, was a very powerful stimulant to me at this precise moment. For by that time, though still very shy, I had got more ambitious about my flute playing, and also became profoundly attracted by classical music; it was when I heard the Bohemian Quartet play Haydn's Quartet in A flat, and Burmester some of Beethoven's Violin Sonatas, that I finally discovered where I stood in music. Miss Smyth's attitude to my playing was somewhat more than derogatory, but she did hold us spellbound by her own performances at the piano, supplementing with her voice everything her fingers couldn't do on the keyboard.

In a completely different vein these were the years when the

bicycle,' which we had started in Monticello, reached my parents' level, and the Danes were often treated to the sight of the Russian Minister with his wife, in enormous tweed bloomers, followed by one or two sons, and a small daughter on a diminutive bicycle, occasionally on a tow rope, progressing solemnly over the flat countryside for their customary Sunday ride.

In those days, Denmark being the homeland of both the future Queen Alexandra and the Empress Marie of Russia, visits by Emperors, Kings and Queens were constant in Copenhagen, and they formed the background of life for the whole Corps Diplomatique, as Denmark in itself was not a very important country in the field of international politics.

Soon came the time when I had to make my way to the University. When I say University that meant to my family Petersburg and not Moscow or Kiev, although there was really no difference between the Alma Maters. As we had no house in Petersburg it was always understood that I would live with one of my uncles. There was quite a wide choice, all, I am glad to say, equally happy to take the responsibility, and, as a matter of fact, having to do so from time to time.

These uncles, as I mentioned before, were provided by the marriages of my mother's sisters; I had not known these people at all, except for a few casual contacts, mostly at Monticello, so going to the university meant for me the assumption of my place in the set which those families formed in Petersburg. There were one or two other sets perhaps of the same standing, but certainly not more: the Sheremeteffs and the Volkonskys for instance,—my own set I had better call the Shuvalov-Voronzov.

When I mention here the importance of these sets I feel some words of explanation are due.

Although only a few of the elder generation were, at the time, occupying important positions in the administration of the Empire, yet in those days of extreme political tension, which immediately preceded the introduction of a limited constitutional régime in Russia, it was through the representatives of these sets that the decisions of the Sovereign could be profoundly influenced.

The reasons for this are difficult to put clearly, but the situation might be summed up as follows: on the one hand there was an obscurely muttering, materially prosperous but politically discontented peasantry, strongly supported by an articulate, radical, in great part even revolutionary intelligentsia. On the other hand a very strong, intelligent and well organised bureaucratic pyramid, which realised better than anyone else the difficulties and dangers that menaced the country. And, at the head of it all, a young sovereign, who had the final word, if only to indicate in what general direction he was prepared to proceed.

Now that is where the influence of the sets I was describing came in; with them the Sovereign could, and did, have constant personal contact. Thus the Emperor had the chance of forming an opinion not based entirely on official reports, but from people who, though completely independent of him, were by tradition, training and usage accustomed to appreciate any political situation in all its aspects and implications.

I think I have said enough here to give the broad outline of the situation in the Russian capital at the time when I first came to live there. It is, of course, the appreciation of an old man, and a tentative one at that, and the boy of sixteen who was dumped down in it not only knew nothing of it, but was only conscious of his own extreme shyness—my brother and I, being products of Sosnofka were not exactly polished either in appearance or manner, and were acutely aware of it.

Consider what I was in for; a dozen or so uncles, aunts and their familiar friends, and about thirty to forty first and second



THE AUTHOR AND COUNTESS NATALIE



THE AUTHOR, COUNT PETER, AND
COUNTESS NATALIE 1900

cousins, half of them either grown-up or near it, and the others of my age or younger. To the older generation I was "Sophie's eldest" and that seemed to explain everything good or bad in me. To the grown-up part of the younger of both sexes I was the "foreigner" who, *volens nolens*, had to be initiated into their ways so as not to be a permanent nuisance. In the younger ones, on the other hand, my foreignness produced a sort of awe, which soon enabled me to take the lead amongst them.

All these people lived in large houses, which ranged from old family town residences, remarkable both for architecture and contents, to ordinary continental apartment houses. For instance, the Shuvalov house, near the Anitchkov Palace and the bridge over the Fontanka—one of the main canals which enabled Peter the Great to build his new capital on a bog—is now, in Soviet times, the Museum of Aristocratic Culture, the original contents forming the main part, only slightly added to from other sources. The domestic arrangements of these houses varied from the relatively formal to the simplest, but all had one thing in common, at least to all of us, in that they were always "open houses". That is to say that literally at any time of day or night we could come and go, take part in or ask for a meal, or even a bed, whether sober or otherwise, and one was always rather sorry for the soldiers amongst us who had to be on parade at 6 a.m. every morning.

St. Petersburg had a winter season; in summer "everyone" went to their country places, a few staying in their suburban villas or going abroad. By winter season I mean from late September to Lent, but most people stayed on till after Easter and the 1st of May Review of the Guards on the Field of Mars. On the whole this season was much like the one in any continental capital, but very different from London of the period.

To begin with, society being smaller, people knew each other far better, which led to closer contact amongst them between the formal functions, and the atmosphere at these also gained

considerably although the time of the year prevented sitting-out, to me the great asset of the corresponding London balls. Every hostess had her "day," once a week in the afternoon, and it was customary too to drop in for the evening tea,¹ followed, as often as not, by an impromptu late supper. These evenings consisted mostly of interminable conversations, tinged with a good deal of political gossip and exchange of information among the older generation, and also provided a basis for all intimacies between the young—the search for the girl of the moment took one sometimes to a number of houses before she was discovered. Chaperonage was officially in full force, but in reality only at formal parties, and otherwise was circumvented with ease and the help of young married women.

All these families, while amply provided with wordly goods in the form of country estates and properties, very seldom had much ready money to spend, and often, at least temporarily, were living above their means, so entertaining was on a comparatively lower scale than that in London. Restaurants were for men only, and the inevitable demi-monde of all categories; the older generation didn't frequent them, and the younger married couples only went to private rooms. Of course the management had to take some care to provide protection for couples in certain situations, and I well remember, having arranged to meet for lunch at Cubat's my cousin Mary Troubetskoy and her husband Juri, he being late was not admitted and told that we were not there.

One entertainment, however, did flourish; these were the Tziganes, the singing Bohemians, and in St. Petersburg we had two distinct clans of them, who were attached respectively to the two suburban restaurants on the islands across the Neva. At a ball or an evening tea, a number of young men, and a few older ones, if they could be got hold of to take charge of the considerable expense involved, having consulted their pocket-

¹about 9 p.m.

books, decided to take their girls to the Bohemians. Telephone calls to bring the party up to ten or twelve were soon made, and one started off between eleven and twelve, usually in specially ordered troikas, for the half hour's drive to "*Black Stream*" or "*Aquarium*". A large private room was taken, wine ordered, and after a wait of not over half an hour, the chorus we had engaged appeared, of about fifteen persons with two or three guitarists, and three or four soloists, men and women, some of them, especially the women, famous all over Russia.

The entertainment started with a chorus of a Bohemian traditional song, then went on with soloists giving their well-known characteristic, interpretation of romantic songs, for solo voices and duets specially written for them all through the nineteenth century. As the evening wore on, more and more requests were made by the members of the party, but also, in the pauses between choruses and solos, most intimate conversations started between the performers and the guests, especially as some were real *aficionados*. In the Bohemian dances sometimes, though seldom, some of the guests would take part; I have seen, at least once, a beautiful cousin of mine performing on the table—we got home on that occasion at 6 a.m.

I took my matriculation at No. 12 Gymnasium, one of the ordinary secondary Day Schools, a stone's throw away from the Shuvalov Fontanka house, where I was living. I passed it easily and well; the Russian essay was on Pushkin, and was so filled by me with quotations from his works that at the oral the examiner told his colleagues that Alexander Sergeich Pushkin might as well have written it himself.

In the autumn of that year I started at the University to read law, which was the accepted course for all not intending to specialise in any particular way; a full degree took four years, but a preliminary one could be achieved in two years or even less.

As a result of the extreme political tension then prevailing, at

least in the two capitals, universities were at that time in a state of permanent ferment and uproar, and the faculty of law especially so. In fact, if one went near the University at all, it was certainly not to go to lectures, but to hold meetings, demonstrations and counter demonstrations of every possible kind, and sometimes even coming up against the police in the streets. Everyone was united in definite opposition to the existing government, but utterly divided in the degrees of their revolutionary ambitions; roughly one third were Constitutionalists, who admitted the Sovereign, and in the other two-thirds the conflict raged between two Republican parties, the Social Revolutionaries and the Social Democrats, who on their left wing had the Bolsheviks.

Having sampled this situation for a short time, I, with my Sosnofka background, felt completely out of sympathy with all the wrangles, although fundamentally I was perhaps even more radical in my outlook than many of the students, and so very soon decided to remain aloof. This was made possible from the educational points of view by the fact that in Russian universities tuition by professors was non-existent, and attendance at lectures not obligatory; for instance, the curriculum was such, in the law faculty, that one could very well get everything from text-books for the first half of the course, never go to a lecture and, nevertheless, pass the necessary annual examination.

On the other hand, I didn't resist at all the temptations of the *monde*, and enjoyed myself thoroughly during the next two St. Petersburg seasons, going to Sosnofka, and for short visits abroad, whenever I could spare the time. My flute continued to accompany me, as it did, except for very short periods, throughout my life, with varying degrees of importance, and I even reached the position of second flute in a semi-permanent amateur orchestra, under the auspices of a Count Shermetteff.

But this sort of life, as such, soon began to pall, and as I thought I had no particular need to take a full law degree, I began to look around for some more satisfying mode of life. It was always understood that at about twenty-five years old I would be through sowing my wild oats and ready to take up the administration of Sosnofka and my part in local government. Therefore there was a gap of several years to be filled.

Russia, since 1874 had universal conscription but one had the right to volunteer earlier after matriculation; that meant joining the colours for one year only, and it was from these volunteers that the cadres of reserve officers were formed. At the time I am describing the Russian Navy was being rapidly expanded, and one could volunteer for it too. But this service demanded a university degree, and took not less than two years, including eighteen months sea time, with the eventual result that, having passed the requisite examination, one became an executive officer on a par with the regulars. This tempted me, with its possibilities of seeing the world, and although none of my family had ever before had any connection with it, in October, 1899, I joined the Imperial Navy as a volunteer.

I should like to mention here that this rather unusual decision was taken quite calmly by both my parents, who always believed in letting us have an entirely free hand in the shaping of our future, and far from interfering in any way, they took an intelligent interest in what we had decided, helped when necessary, but, on principle refrained from giving us even good advice, if not asked for. I think this example could be profitably followed by all parents; I certainly have never met a more united family than ours was in all my life.

CHAPTER 11

THE IMPERIAL NAVY AND THE JAPANESE WAR

I STARTED my naval training as a volunteer in one of the two ships kept on the naval establishment for the training of petty officers of the executive branch; in this our volunteers differed from the naval college cadets, who used their own ships. Mine was called the *Gigit* and built in the 1860s, square rigged, except for the mizzen, with a complement of about two hundred P.O.-pupils, a number of instructors, a crew for the auxiliary engine, and a wardroom of twelve officers including instructors, all commanded by Captain Count Tolstoi.

The training, a hard one, was exactly the same as that of the P.O.-pupils, down to swabbing and stoning the decks, at least for the first months. For me personally, who hated heights, going aloft in all weathers proved the greatest hardship, and I never entirely got over my feeling of vertigo and the constant fear of releasing my hold on the rigging.

The volunteers, of which there were four, had a cabin to themselves, but with only three berths; it was, of course, assumed, and correctly so, that one of us would always be on watch. When I first joined, coming off watch I used to change the sheets of my relief, but this happened, I think, twice, and

after that, like all the rest, I just got into the still warm bed of my predecessor.

Our cruise took us first to Vigo on the Spanish coast—our only port of call after leaving Kronstadt—to end at St. Thomas in the West Indies, which was still Danish at the time. Our week's stay there passed without incident worth recording, and we sailed home, again with one port of call, Madeira. On the whole, one would say, an uneventful voyage, but in fact it gave me an experience which left its mark on me forever. Under sail for days with the trade-winds in tropical waters going at about 10 knots with a slight list, the soft swish of the water and hardly perceptible creaking of the rigging, created such a feeling of well being, both physical and mental, that made my going to sea not the stop gap I had imagined it would be, but the first step towards my becoming a sailor.

On our return to Kronstadt, I had completed my training as a P.O., and was due for transfer to a ship on active service, for the rest of my officer's training. The naval college cadets' training at this point differed again from ours, inasmuch as their finishing stage was passed as midshipmen in the special training squadron of the Baltic Fleet.

The Russian Navy, another creation of Peter the Great's, consisted then, in European waters, of two main parts: the Baltic Fleet based on Kronstadt, a small fortified island at the mouth of the Neva, intended for the protection of St. Petersburg, and the Black Sea Fleet, based on Sebastopol. By far the most considerable of the two was the Baltic and, here the first Pacific Squadron was formed, ultimately to be based on Vladivostock and Port Arthur, newly leased from the Chinese.

With the expansion of Russia into Manchuria, those two ports began to acquire an importance of the first magnitude. At the time Japan, after a victorious conclusion of her war with China, was arming rapidly to achieve a first-class navy in those waters, and it appeared essential for Russia to be provided there

with an equivalent force. In 1899, two of the three pre-dreadnoughts, the *Poltava* and *Sebastopol*, designated to form the nucleus of the first Pacific Squadron, were ready in St. Petersburg, where they had been built.

An opportunity to join one of these two ships seemed to me too good to be missed: and a little wangling in higher circles by my father, coupled with the fact that the commander of the *Poltava* was a Prince Lieven, a distant relation, produced a posting to that battleship.

I joined the *Poltava* at Kronstadt in September, after a short leave at Sosnofka, where my uniform produced its due impression both on the staff and the rest of the population, a Sosnofka which I was not to see again for two years. I was the only volunteer on board and was put into the hands of the senior navigator and other specialists, stood watches on a par with the sublieutenants and was admitted to the wardroom, as Russian ships had no gun-room for junior officers; apart from this my position corresponded more or less to that of a midshipman in the R.N. Except for minor details the ship was quite ready and two weeks later we sailed for the Far East, preceded by a few days by the *Sebastopol*.

Apart from daily routine, the same in all the navies the world over and to which I settled down soon enough, I became conscious of a sensation which I am sure is shared by all sea-going people—the sheer comfort of seeing the world in a home from home. This I think allows you to appreciate what comes your way better than any other form of travel. Three landfalls, all seen at dawn, I still remember; the stark form of Cadiz with its memories of Columbus and the Armada, the luminous quality, near to banality and yet unforgettable, of the Bay of Naples with Vesuvius behind and lastly the Parthenon on arriving at Athens with Salamis just behind us. For ever after the whole Mediterranean, only dimly felt at Monticello, became in its present and its past, with all its implications, a living reality to me.

Despite the fact that the *Poltava* and *Sebastopol* were destined for the same squadron and were to sail at the same time, our captains, both of the same promotion and rather hoary specimens of the kind, for reasons which naval men will readily appreciate had obtained orders to sail separately, with the result that our two ships met only at one port of call, Athens, before we reached our destination.

We sighted the *Sebastopol* for the first time just outside Athens, and proceeded to enter the Piraeus in its wake, having exchanged recognition and greetings signals only. At this precise moment a German naval training ship was about to leave. The basin of Piraeus, though amply sufficient for the Greek fleet about to meet the Persians at Salamis proved a little tight for two pre-dreadnoughts to enter and one frigate to leave simultaneously. The Germans, correct as always, if not dressing their ship completely, had its crew line the yards, and their band playing one of the anthems of the nations involved. We responded in kind and so did the Greek Royal Yacht, berthed alongside the quay.

On our bridges tempers were slowly and inevitably deteriorating, and suddenly above the non-synchronised din of our bands the stentorian voice of *Sebastopol's* old man came through the megaphone. "Misha, you fool, if you don't get your b . . . y gumshoe out of my way, I shall give you a taste of my ram." To which our old man, whose voice had even more carrying power started up with: "Arkashka, you son of a b . . . h!" followed by an unparalleled flow of really unprintable abuse. All this was listened to in rapt but respectful attention by the full complement of both ships, the men lining the railings in response to the Germans; they even forgot their cheering, which strict naval etiquette demanded. We had another audience too; the King and Queen of Greece, assembled on their Royal Yacht; (a) to see off the German ship, who carried amongst the cadets one of the minor Hohenzollerns, and (b) to greet us,

the Queen being a Grand Duchess of Russia. The cause of all this lamentable muddle was, of course, our Greek pilots who had not agreed beforehand amongst themselves where respectively to berth our ships.

Then came the Suez Canal and the Red Sea, where we changed into whites and immediately met a Russian ship coming up which had already changed into blues. A short call at Aden, memorable to me for its first glimpse of the Hindu mentality, when I was forcibly prevented from squashing a cockroach on the floor by an old shopkeeper, and realised suddenly how different was their attitude to life and death. On to Colombo, my first real contact with the tropics, where the starboard watch were poisoned by some herb which came with the vegetables, but not fatally; then to Pulowejo, at the northern end of Sumatra, where we had our first serious casualty: our senior lieutenant was killed on the fore deck while we were anchoring. He was buried on the island and the Dutch gunboat sent a small detachment to his funeral; they impressed me very much with their uniforms, which seemed to come from an eighteenth century print of the battle of Cape St. Vincent, and by their age, as not one of them appeared to be less than sixty.

At Hongkong, our next port of call, one of the highlights was the dinner given to our wardroom by the British cavalry regiment stationed there, when the evening ended at a performance of the "Geisha" by a touring British troupe. We were all in such high spirits that, after the final curtain, we went backstage and made the company, or at least the female part of it, repeat the last act with our assistance. The orchestra had gone home, and its place was taken by one of our lieutenants, a very able pianist, and by myself on the drums, but my performance was forcibly interrupted by a British cornet falling through them off the stage.

From Hongkong on to Nagasaki, where we met men-of-war of all the Treaty Powers, British, French and Italian: European

concessions were then still in full force, and it is difficult to imagine now the following incident in which I took part.

The various crews had shore leave on the same days, and used, all together, to invade a certain quarter of Nagasaki called, I believe, Inasa, which was reached by a floating bridge across some mudflats. One day when I was approaching it in charge of our shore patrol I saw three British Marines in their red-coats sitting at leisure on the bridge railings. Suddenly several French sailors, in a drunken, nasty mood went for them and pushed them off into the mud. Literally in no time the whole bridge was filled with sailors of all nations fighting each other according to the sympathies of the moment, whereas we, the several shore patrols, had to throw ourselves into the midst of this seething mass to try and establish some sort of order, by dragging, sometimes by their heels, the worst offenders to the boats, and some discomfort was caused by the Italians, not averse to using their knives. The Japanese police and population watched all this silently from a respectful distance.

Apart from this exploit, from which I returned not without several nasty bruises, I did in Nagasaki all the things customary for a young naval man first in Japan; I bought innumerable trifles, made the acquaintance of geishas in all their aspects, musical and otherwise, had a dragon tattooed into my forearm in three colours, and ordered a kimono with our family crest woven into its shoulders.

We arrived in the Far East at the tail-end of the Boxer campaigns—the Talu forts had been taken, the legations relieved, and the Summer Palace looted. Very soon after our arrival I and six men were lent to an obsolete gunboat of ours, called *Sivutch*, and for about six months knocked about such places as Chifu, Shanghai-Huan, Chinampo and finally Shanghai itself. The *Sivutch*, belonging to what was known as the Siberian Flotilla, our only forces in the Far East before the formation of the 1st Pacific Squadron, was in all senses a rum

boat, as were all the other ships in that flotilla. It was officered and manned by a crew who had nothing to do all their lives, except mildly patrol rivers, sometimes anchoring for weeks on end eight miles outside Shanghai Huan, always in company with the same kind of vessel belonging to the other treaty nations.

The only thing I remember about this period was that I had my taste of opium smoking; this drug produced no effect on me whatsoever and from the first I disliked it, and so ran no risk at all of becoming an addict. One would think that this sort of life would bring one into close contact with the local population, but although I saw a great deal, the absence of language proved as always, to be an insuperable barrier, as I didn't know pidgin English either, the only *lingua franca* for those days.

In October I rejoined the *Poltava* at Vladivostock, and by that time had completed my eighteen months' sea-time; I had made such excellent progress in my navigational training and other subjects, such as gunnery and torpedoes, that it was decided to ship me back to St. Petersburg in time for a few months final preparation for the commissioning examination in the spring of 1902. When naval personnel were returned to base, they went in a homeward bound man-of-war, but in its absence could be sent overland; the time allowance given for that journey was still calculated on the basis of horse-drawn transport, in spite of the fact that the Siberian railway had been in existence for some years! So I had three to four months to spare before I needed to report at St. Petersburg and deciding to return via Canada, embarked at Yokohama on one of the C.P.R. Empresses, landing three weeks later in Vancouver.

On board it so happened that I made a French friend, who spoke excellent English, which I didn't at all at the time, and together we started to make our way across British Columbia and Canada to Montreal on our way to Europe. On the train some Americans persuaded us to break our journey and stay with them at Milwaukee; we did so, and after a week, were

sent on by them to some friends of theirs in Pittsburg. To cut this long story short, we reached New York two months later, having had the time of our lives at practically no cost at all.

Of late I have become a diligent reader of American fiction, and I still cannot make up my mind whether the U.S.A. has completely changed or is just the same as when I saw it. The more than generous hospitality, the extreme ease of establishing intimate relationships with casual acquaintances, the insatiable curiosity, the rather slow though nervous tempo of life all seem to be the same to-day. Though it is true that our journey took us from one comparatively small centre to another, and New York with the Waldorf Hotel, where we stayed only two days, produced very little effect at all, now in retrospect the whole of the U.S.A. appears like one large village, seething with life and excitement, and I suspect that the superimposed wireless, T.V. and so on, have a minor effect on this state of affairs and on the disposition of the natives. But one thing I should think does not exist any more; the initial respect that was accorded us as Europeans has surely gone.

Later I discovered that my parents, by then established in London, had attempted to trace me to discover the cause of my delay. A telegram, I am told, was sent to the Russian Legation in Washington, requesting possible information as to my whereabouts, but, of course, without result in those incredibly happy days of no passports and no registrations at any place or frontier.

Finally I did reach St. Petersburg, went back to live with Uncle Paul Shuvalov, and after three months of most intensive cramming, passed my commissioning examination, and on St. Nicholas Day, 1902, was promoted Sub-lieutenant of the Imperial Navy, 57th in a promotion of 211.

My main concern was to take part as long as possible, in the civilised life of the capital, at its best in early spring, before the inevitable posting to the 1st Pacific. To achieve this object I

joined the Divers' School at Kronstadt, which gave me the possibility of continuing to live at home, with the only discomfort of leaving every morning at 6 a.m. on the *Dachnik*, an ancient small passenger boat plying between St. Petersburg and Kronstadt, loaded with incipient hangovers. I became a diver, 2nd class, and never dreamed that I would have to exercise my knowledge in the way I did, as, in peace-time at least, the duties of officer divers were confined mainly to the supervision of the ratings.

The rest of the summer was passed in a few of the oldest ships in the Baltic, such as the obsolete ironclad named *Ne tron menia* (*noli me tangere*) often amplified with "Or I'll go to pieces." It cruised backwards and forwards day after day on a distance of twelve miles from Basin No. 2 to the Tolbukhov Lighthouse, doing duty as a school for artificers. One or two other jobs of the same character finally brought me in autumn to Libau, where I was paid off, and returned to the officers pool at St. Petersburg.

There I was, sitting pretty, enjoying myself much in every way while the going was good, when one day, quite out of the blue, I was sent for by a certain mother who asked very delicately about my intentions and possibilities; I had, it seems, been playing too many sonatas for flute and piano. This frightened me so much that with a bit of super wangling I managed an immediate posting to the Far East.

This time I went overland by the Siberian railway and its branch, the Sino Manchurian and, in due course arrived at its terminus Port Arthur. This journey took twelve days, and was accomplished in the extreme comfort of International Wagon-lits, which quite apart from the fact that the broader Russian gauge made them even more comfortable than European ones, provided excellent food and drink. The company, which included a number of foreigners, was interesting, gay and most agreeable. As it was winter the landscape up to Irkutsk at least

was polar, and one look sufficient to appreciate the whole of it.

I chose to have a break of three days at Irkutsk, the capital of Siberia, and a lively town, as I had a friend there. This was Peter Wrangel, afterwards the famous C.-in-C. of the White Russian Army in 1918-22; by profession a mining engineer, he was employed on the staff of the Governor-General and in charge of gold and copper reserves. We had an enjoyable time together, our chief attraction being the opera, in all respects, including the quality of production, the singers and orchestra, a miniature replica of the Mariinsky.

The Siberians generally in certain aspects reminded me of the Americans I had just visited, except for one important difference—they were not a mixture of races, but pure Russians. There is a similarity too between the growth of Australia and that of Siberia. Both started with convict settlements; for both that stage lay already far in the past, and both had produced a race of strong, extremely independent people, who made excellent though rather undisciplined soldiers.

As a final mark of friendship Peter Wrangel lent me his fur coat for the sledge crossing of Lake Baikal, the only break then in the railway line. From there onwards the scenery changed and became very impressive, as the train wound its way through the gorges of the Baikal Mountains, and another four days brought me to my destination.

I was posted straightaway to the battle cruiser *Rurik*, but not for long, and then achieved the dream of every junior officer out there, and was transferred to a destroyer named *Grozovoi*—it belonged to the 1st Division, the “frenchmen” we called them as they were built in France.

The chief attraction of the destroyer service lay in the absence of anchor watches and the free and easy atmosphere of wardrooms under comparatively young captains. Destroyers in the Far East had a very busy time, and were constantly sent in ones and twos all over the place. My *Grozovoi*, for instance,

was employed for a whole summer in carrying weekly dispatches from the Russian Legation at Seoul to Port Arthur to ensure secret and safe transmission. Unfortunately, after a peaceful beginning, my relations with the Captain, for one reason or another, gradually deteriorated, and as a result a sudden and quite unexpected posting to the *Retvisan* took place towards the end of 1903. This ship had just arrived from the U.S.A., and was, though a pre-dreadnought, with the *Tset-sarevitch*, the most powerful, fast, and well-appointed battleship of the 1st Pacific. It was commanded by one of our ablest captains, who unfortunately was, and always had been, the terror of all the junior officers in the Imperial Navy, and so obviously my posting was in the nature of a disciplinary measure. I was appointed second navigator, and started to undergo Captain Shenznovitch's personal grilling, given to all young men posted to his ship in the way I was, during the first two weeks on board.

Whatever the atmosphere in Europe, to the fleet in the Far East, things had looked ominous for quite some time past. All sorts of rumours were flying about, especially in connection with some timber concessions on both banks of the River Yalu, which divides Korea from Manchuria. They were granted, it was said, by the Korean Government to a rather mysterious group of Russian capitalists. For some reason or another, not at all, I may say, clear to us, this gave rise to violent opposition on the part of the Japanese, and we vaguely knew that protracted negotiations on the subject had been under way for some time, at the highest levels, between the two capitals. The general attitude and policy followed by the Imperial Russian Government at these preliminary stages of conflict with Japan, with its

fatal repercussions on the readiness of the naval forces in the Far East, could be tentatively summed up as follows.

Japan, having just victoriously concluded its war with China, and obviously on the make in the Far East, had in no way as yet, in the eyes of the Western Powers at least, acquired the standing in the comity of nations which would allow her to dare to act independently of her particular sponsor among the Great Powers—at the time Great Britain. On the other hand, to the Emperor Nicolas II, as chief promoter of the Hague Peace Conference—the direct predecessor of both the League of Nations and U.N.O.—it was essential to show that, although a certain strengthening of Russian naval forces for the restoration of some sort of balance could not be helped, a comparatively minor case of conflicting interest such as the Yalu timber concessions, could always be resolved by peaceful negotiation. Such an attitude was the more important, as it would react beneficially on Anglo-Russian relations; pre-occupation with which must have seemed, to responsible circles in Europe, of infinitely greater importance than a situation at the other end of the world, involving an as yet minor power, whose efforts to raise its status in the world could be watched with a certain complacency and even, in the case of England, with sympathy. Consequently, non-provocation and in modern terms, appeasement, at all costs as it proved, were the rule of the day.

To the man on the spot, however, these remote considerations, if dimly appreciated were, nevertheless, completely outweighed by his immediate observation of the Japanese general attitude, and actual preparations, which both pointed in one direction only—a final show-down while the going was good.

January, 1904, found the Russian naval forces in the Far East divided as to their dispositions. The battleships, seven of them, with a squadron of second-class and light cruisers, and two divisions, of twelve destroyers each, at Port Arthur; the battle cruisers, three of them, with one division of destroyers, at

Vladivostock. Disposed therefore in such a way that it would have been difficult for them to concentrate in case of need, separated as they were by the Straits of Tsushima. Lastly, a small detached squadron consisting of a second-class cruiser and two destroyers, at Chimulpo, the port of the capital of Korea, Seoul.

This situation was disturbing enough in itself, but was made worse by coinciding with an economy drive from St. Petersburg, which expressed itself in a reduction to a minimum of seagoing exercises, mainly to economise the expensive Welsh coal, and in the reduction of gunnery practice, to economise munitions, and various other measures of the kind. The crowning touch to the overall situation was that, according to the general tenor of orders from St. Petersburg, a pacifist drive was also under way—extreme caution was to be observed, by the naval forces especially, so that anything provocative or that could be interpreted as such, had to be avoided at all costs. Need I say that all this was in such contradiction with the needs of the situation as observed on the spot that the Naval Command tried to oppose the whole policy by every means at their disposal, verging, sometimes, on direct insubordination. All this was conveyed to Headquarters of the active forces through our Viceroy of the Far East, residing, of all places, in Mukden, the capital of Manchuria.

I think I should mention here that while the aforesaid rumours and measures were the general topic of talk in the fleet, I myself had a special source of information. One of the juniors on the staff of the C.-in-C. 1st Pacific was a particular friend of mine (of the same promotion), and through him a great deal, unavailable even to our seniors, reached my ears, for those were simpler days, when the various top secrets were perhaps not so closely observed as they would be now.

To be ready for action at sea, the battle squadron at Port Arthur had to be kept at anchor on the outer roadstead, pro-

tected, if at all, by a few mortar shore batteries manned by gunners of the garrison. The inner harbour with its two basins, though just large enough to accommodate the fleet, nevertheless, with its long, narrow entrance channel, not only hampered speedy deployment, but presented the very real danger of it being bottled up, if not for good, at least for a considerable time.

As the New Year dawned, there were the main Russian naval forces in the Far East massed, in a scarcely protected position, with their cruisers in an outer ring, and the destroyers in the inner harbour, except for a number of them sent nightly to form a patrolling screen about ten to fifteen miles out. Even those had been, by superior orders, reduced to two—a number which was equivalent to no screen at all, as the future proved only too conclusively. By the middle of January all shore leave for officers and men, even for a few hours, had been cancelled, and torpedo nets were set every night on all ships; permission to rig them had been sought, and reluctantly granted, from Mukden. On the other hand, such preparations for action as the removal from the ships of surplus woodwork, boats, furniture, etc., were not allowed, and the non-blacked-out fleet had to carry full riding lights at anchor: all this in the spirit of the non-provocation campaign intended to allay the growing excitement in Japan, and to smooth the path of the Yalu negotiations. To calm our ruffled spirits we were given to understand that these negotiations were proceeding quite satisfactorily, and that there was no cause for anxiety whatsoever.

Then something happened, and that before the eyes of everyone, officers and men alike, which by its very nature was conclusive and could allow for one interpretation only. One day, two small Japanese steamers arrived at Port Arthur, entered the inner harbour, and left by noon the next day. By then

they had on board every single Japanese resident—men, women and children, with all their belongings, including the Vice-Consul. It was remarkable that the whole operation, involving several hundred people, took only twenty-four hours to complete: obviously everybody concerned had been forewarned and was ready to leave at a moment's notice, whenever the ships arrived. I was on deck when they passed our stern, and had a glimpse again of the inscrutable, and yet shaded with contempt, air of the Japanese crowd, first seen on the Inasa bridge at Nagasaki where it was completely justified. I was, unfortunately, many times to watch it again in the not so distant future.

And so we come to January 25th (old style), one of the many St. Mary's Days in the Greek Orthodox Calendar. Let me explode once more, and I hope, once and for all, the myth that a number of ranking and junior officers of the fleet—according to some, everyone except the watchkeepers—were attending that evening a birthday party given ashore, at the Naval Club, by the Port Admiral's lady. This party did indeed take place, and was well attended, there being quite enough officers on the harbour staff, and from the few minor units of the fleet in repair, to go; but not one man from the ships outside, or the destroyers inside, was there. In the general atmosphere of uneasy expectation no one would have dreamed of attending, even if a strict no-shore-leave order had not been in force.

It was a grey, muggy afternoon, rather warm for the time of the year, and the sea a flat calm, when I, by that time one of the senior sub-lieutenants on board, and in every way a fully integrated member of the 1st Pacific Squadron, took over at 4 p.m. the watch of the *Retvisan* on this 25th of January, 1904. At 5 p.m. as per standing orders, I lowered the torpedo nets and was at peace with the world, with the old man on board in a comparatively good temper—he had had a constitutional on the quarterdeck earlier in the afternoon, and had been very

amiable to my predecessor—and nothing much to do till I went off at 8 p.m.

Suddenly a flurry on the upper bridge indicated that the yeoman of the watch had not missed the signs on the flagships' bridge indicating the C.-in-C. was about to make a signal. Smart service demanded that the Admiral's signal should be read and acknowledged as it went up and sure enough, in about ninety seconds, the leading yeoman proffered me the usual tablet. I glanced at it and saw: "C.-in-C. to ZO¹: STOW TORPEDO NETS REPEAT." Down went the tablet to the Captain, and about fifteen minutes later the torpedo nets of the whole squadron protected the ships no more.

I have had it since, on tolerably good authority, that such was the stunning effect of this signal that one of our most prominent captains committed an unbelievable breach of procedure by causing a hand signal to be made to the flagship questioning its accuracy, and requesting confirmation. This, though acknowledged, got no reply, although the C.-in-C. himself had reacted even more sharply, if possible, to the order when it reached him from St. Petersburg via Mukden. He straightaway repeated in the most peremptory terms a request made many times before for permission to take the fleet out to sea, the only relatively safe place against a sudden attack. I have seen the text of that telegram, with the just as emphatic refusal in reply.

Eight p.m. and my relief came along, and after a solitary watchkeeper's supper, and a few games of backgammon, I went to my cabin to have a look before turning in, at the newly arrived volume of Maurice Baring's plays in verse. Some time after 11 p.m. I had got to the middle of Maurice's "Tristram" when I heard a dull, distant thud, followed in under a minute by a spatter of fire from what seemed to be medium calibre guns. In an instant I had my coat on, and rushed up on deck, and was half-way up the companion way when the *Retvisan* shuddered,

¹Call sign of the 1st Pacific Squadron.

with hardly any sound, as if under the impact of a heavy tug being thrown against it by the swell. Out I came on deck, and found the port roadstead lit up by searchlights scurrying to and fro all over the horizon. Our first gunner, Razvozov, was standing alone on the quarterdeck, looking out to sea. I asked him "What's up?" He turned silently to me, and pointed a finger towards the sea. And there, in the distance, a grey shape was moving out, with some gun splashes round it. I said: "It's him?" and he nodded. At the same time the water alarm sounded all over the ship, followed at once by "action stations." Straight up to the bridge I went where my action station was to be at the Captain's disposal as second navigator. We reached the bridge simultaneously. He was laconic too: "Here we are, Benck. Call out the clinometer reading every minute," as the ship had begun to list slowly to starboard.

So for the next twenty minutes, listening with one ear to reports coming from various parts of the ship, either vocally or by telephone, I kept my eye on the clinometer, informing the Captain of the progress of the list. It was, of course common knowledge at what angle of list we were due to capsize, and it was about 3 degrees before this critical figure was reached that the needle of the clinometer wavered, stood still, and a few seconds later, began slowly to move back.

A torpedo had struck us amidships and destroyed the starboard compartment of underwater torpedo tubes. It caused the only loss of life that day—the leading torpedo artificer and his four men, who had their berths there, were drowned in their hammocks. During the twenty minutes the ship took to return to even keel, I was sent down to the lower decks to report on progress there, and was just in time to see the last watertight door being secured. Some water, but not too much, was still coming through.

All that period was accompanied, to begin with at least, by rather brisk fire from what sounded like all the medium and

light guns of the fleet, but this soon died down—the attack was over. And, but for the searchlights still on, the riding lights, however, out, and certain activity on two other ships, dimly perceived from our deck, everything was calm again. Hand signals from the flagship requested an officer to be sent over to report; my Captain scribbled a few words on a piece of paper in the charthouse, handed it to me folded and said: “Off you go, Benck, but mind, don’t make too much of it.”

My friend of the staff met me at the foot of the Admiral’s bridge, and waving me on said: “On the upper bridge. He’s alone there.” I doubled up the three ladders and in the uncertain half-light of the searchlights I saw the short, stocky and bearded figure of the Admiral leaning over the railings, his face hidden in his hands and his shoulders shaking with hardly audible sobs. After a few seconds I stepped forward and at the sound the Admiral straightened himself and turned to me, his face calm with his usual amiable, if slightly tired, expression. I handed him the folded paper; he glanced at it and said: “Can’t read it here. We’ll go below, but start telling me what you have to say.”

Vice Admiral Stark, a gunner by speciality, had always had the highest reputation in the Service, both as a sailor, and as a ship’s Captain, and was, for his benign and equable temper, only too rare in those days among his peers, truly beloved by officers and men alike. And yet he was not the most prominent amongst flag officers of his seniority at the time he was given his present command—perhaps the spirit of non-provocation was once more at work in this instance. But, however he would have fared if he had led us in battle, one thing was certain, and we all knew it; he had done everything in a man’s power to make the fleet under his command the best and the most alert fighting force possible under the circumstances. After what had just happened, it would have been as obvious to him, as to all of us, that battleflags would never be hoisted under his command.

Although officially he was, so to speak, never heard of again, he was always remembered and honoured by us of the 1st Pacific.

The note sent by my Captain to the C.-in-C. was concerned with the delay in the arrival of the tugs which were to take the *Retvisan* into the inner harbour—it would have taken several hours to make a head of steam sufficient to move her under her own power—and the message given to me by the C.-in-C. on parting was that the tugs concerned were on the way and that the *Retvisan* had precedence over the *Tsesarevich*, which had a slightly deeper draught and was the other battleship torpedoed that night. Sure enough, the four most powerful tugs at the disposal of the port authorities overtook my boat on the way back, and by 2 a.m. they had the *Retvisan* safely in tow and moving slowly toward the entrance of the passage into the inner harbour. This was reached about an hour later but here a hitch in the operation occurred: the high water necessary for a ship of *Retvisan*'s size and drawing more owing to the weight of the water in the flooded compartments had gone, and we were grounded across the mouth of the passage with our broadside towards the sea, obliged to wait for the next high tide.

The next morning held in store two new experiences for me; one was directly due to the cussedness of my Captain, the other bound to happen sooner or later in a war. Although the *Retvisan* carried a Leading Diver and his two mates, a very experienced and entirely trustworthy team, Captain Shenznovitch chose to remember that I was a Diving Officer, 2nd Class, a fact which I had nearly forgotten myself. And he demanded that I should be the first to go down to ascertain the extent of the damage done to the hull by the torpedo. So as soon as the light was good enough, comforted by the encouragements of my divers, I donned the appropriate clothes and went down in about 20 feet of water. I came up twenty minutes later to report about the jagged hole in the side of the ship, 20 feet one way,

and 12 the other, vaguely perceived by me through the muddy water. All this happened early, and I retired to what I thought a well-earned rest in my cabin, but not for long. It must have been about 10 a.m. that I was woken by "action stations." I got up, and rushed on deck, one of the last this time, when a nerve-shattering incident occurred as I was climbing up the last ladder. One of our drummers was going down in a hurry to repeat his "action stations" on a lower deck, and simultaneously the tremendous noise of an enormous shell sailing over drowned everything else. We met head on and rolled down, both firmly convinced that we were killed.

Eventually I reached my post on the upper bridge and there saw where the shells were coming from. It was a beautiful sunlit morning, and in the far distance the Japanese battle fleet was slowly steaming past in line ahead, occasional flashes of their biggest guns punctuating their progress. In the half distance, our fastest and newest light cruiser, the *Novik* was speeding toward them. The big guns of our ships had opened up by that time too, but it was obvious that the range was beyond the limit of effective gunnery power for both sides. Slowly the line of Japanese ships disappeared towards the west, and the *Novik* returned after a sharp encounter with three Japanese light cruisers. What was accomplished by this particular exploit we never discovered, except that the younger members of its ward-room became intolerable for quite some time afterwards.

The war with Japan had started and soon Port Arthur and its hinterland were cut off from the rest of the world, being gradually more and more closely invested till its surrender nearly a year later. In due course our three damaged ships were taken into the inner harbour, and in two months by the very creditable efforts of the dockyard, made fit again for active service. While undergoing repairs the *Retvisan* was hit by a shell

from the two new battle-cruisers, *Nissen* and *Kassuga*, acquired by the Japanese from the Argentine, who came several times for a desultory spell of shelling the inner harbour. We could not prevent this, as they were so fast as to be safe even from our massed destroyer attack—this was proved when tried once or twice. The damage done by this shell was not serious, apart from a certain loss of life, but it was the first hit achieved by those two battle-cruisers, and the new C.-in-C. requesting an officer to report in detail, I was sent to do so. By this time the the new C.-in-C. was no less a person than Admiral Makaroff. For a long time Peter Alexeitch had been one of the best-known figures in the Russian Navy and his taking charge completely altered the atmosphere of gloom and despondency into which, it cannot be denied, the initial disaster had plunged us; we were all convinced that his arrival could not but reverse the fortunes of war. But it was not his fate to stay with us long. One day, in April, while taking out the five sound battle-ships for a joint exercise, he went down with his flagship *Petropavolsk*, sunk by an enemy mine.

It was the first occasion that one of our ships was destroyed by that means, and our first intimation that the Japanese would use this weapon. Recently transferred to destroyers, I was able to watch this crowning calamity as my division was out with the battle fleet on that day. The *Petropavolsk* was going down, nose first, and one saw at one moment the whole stern poised in the air standing nearly upright, with the screws still revolving slowly, and men jumping and falling past them into the sea, till a short while after the ship resumed its downward movement, and with a final jerk, disappeared for ever into the flood. My friend of the staff told me afterwards, that, being on the bridge when the *Petropavolsk* hit the mine, he, for some reason or another, gripped the railings in front of him, and went down, still keeping a tight hold, till the colour of the water round him changed from green to black, a slight bump was

felt, and letting go he was thrown to the surface. In the distance the battleship *Pobieda*, another casualty of that ill-fated sortie, with a strong list to starboard, could be seen racing towards the entrance of the harbour and safety—for one instant the incongruous vision of a winged mallard speeding toward the protecting rushes flashed through my mind. We at once became busy picking up survivors, and one of our numbers salvaged the C.-in-C's. greatcoat, recognisable by the shoulder tabs, as he was the only Admiral of the Fleet in Port Arthur at that time; but the hopes raised by this came to naught—we were told the Admiral never wore a coat on the bridge. But all this was still to come, and I now go back to the only time I had the privilege of meeting Admiral Makaroff in person, when I reported on the *Retvisan*'s damage from the *Kassuga* shell.

In the boat I suddenly became conscious of the fact that I had forgotten to put on a starched collar and tie. The feeling of nervous apprehension of appearing in such undress before the C.-in-C. was by no means mitigated by another *Nissen* or *Kassuga* shell coming down about twenty yards from the boat, and consequently I was not at my best before the great man. He noticed it, and said amiably: "Buck up, my friend, and tell me what's happened," and I did buck up and made a tolerably coherent report. In making this report to the Admiral in his cabin I had, against all usage, managed to keep my greatcoat on, and so was able to conceal my absence of collar and tie; this greatly helped me to acquit myself creditably and to his entire satisfaction, expressed in rather flattering terms. That meeting, short as it was, seemed to enhance, if possible, the feeling of admiration and devotion that he was able to inspire in everyone with whom he came into contact.

So it came about that I returned to my ship in a quite different and very pleasant mood, and there, oh wonder, a more agreeable surprise awaited me—things pleasant and alas, unpleasant too, do come together in life. It transpired that one of

our best destroyer captains had actually asked for my transfer to his 2nd Division destroyer *Silny*, as group navigator and senior executive. Lieutenant-Commander Krinitski had recently distinguished himself by sinking, under concentrated fire of a superior enemy, two of the several old merchant ships sent by the Japanese to block the entrance to the inner harbour. During this encounter he lost several fingers on both hands when personally taking part in emergency repairs to a steam pipe damaged by a shell splinter. He was, as far as I know, the first naval officer in that campaign to be awarded the St. George's Cross, the Russian equivalent to the V.C. Though not an easy man to get on with he was held in great esteem for being fundamentally equitable and not unhelpful to all who served under him.

About ten days later I found myself duly installed in the *Silny*, in what to me was the exalted position of senior executive—the envy of all my contemporaries, most of whom were slaving in the big ships, a kind of service made especially irksome by the enforced inactivity of the battle squadron. In the *Silny* I was to remain the whole summer until towards the end of the siege she was lost on a mine, a fact that forcibly transferred my activities from the sea to the land front of the fortress.

Destroyers—both divisions of them—were kept busy all through that time in keeping the approaches to Port Arthur clear of enemy mines, laid continuously in the Japanese effort to block the port for the battle squadron: these mines were laid at night by Japanese destroyers and all our efforts to prevent this by night patrols proved ineffective and costly to our limited destroyer force. Owing to the complete lack of trawlers or any vessels that could be adapted as such, the mine-sweeping operation had to be performed by destroyers, joined in pairs simply by a length of steel cable. This steel cable tore the mine from its anchor, whereupon it bobbed to the surface,

and was sunk by a burst of machine gun fire. Each dawn, two, and sometimes three, pairs of trawling destroyers proceeded at 4 to 5 knots along certain courses previously laid out, with, a mile or so out to sea, a protecting screen of another four destroyers moving on a parallel course at the same speed. Yet further out one could dimly perceive, out of range, up to six Japanese destroyers, moving backwards and forwards at a slightly greater speed, watching our activities. Sometimes, for no apparent reason whatsoever, but, I suppose, to relieve the monotony of the uniformly grilling hot sub-tropical days, one of the opposing senior officers would decide to get closer and fire a few shots, immediately returned by the other side. Twenty to fifty rounds expended, with hardly ever a direct hit, and only small damage from splinters of near misses, the old positions were resumed and calm restored. Another duty of ours was to protect the forays of our remaining minelayer—the other was lost, the very first day of the war, on its own mine, whilst laying a protective minefield in front of the commercial port of Dalny, a few miles north of Port Arthur.

I have described the general background of this long monotonous spring and summer, but it was punctuated by a number of occasions of a much more lively kind. The most outstanding, and only really comforting one in all this disastrous campaign, occurred when the Japanese blockading squadron suffered a loss equivalent to ours, on the material side at least, when the *Petropavlovsk* had gone down.

The blockading battle squadron's nearly constant courses having been observed for some time, the minelayer *Amour*, convoyed by four destroyers of the 2nd flotilla, of which one was the *Silny*, was sent one night to lay a minefield on the customary route of the Japanese, whilst a section of the 1st flotilla at the same time successfully decoyed the enemy night-screen. Dawn found our two flotillas, with all available light-and second-class cruisers—alas, only three of them—

concentrated within striking distance of the newly-laid minefield: from the Japanese side it must have seemed as if our Command was preparing a general sortie, and at once a similar enemy concentration, but twice as powerful, was in progress from all quarters of the horizon, soon to be poised over us just out of range, ready to drive us back and only waiting for the executive signal to do so. Again the sea was calm, the sky only slightly overcast, and the visibility, in spite of a slight haze, excellent, and there, in line ahead, the seven ships of the Japanese battle squadron appeared, followed at some distance by their heavy cruisers, *Nissen* and *Kassuga*, steering directly for the minefield. As they approached danger, the suspense on our ships became wellnigh intolerable and, as often in such cases, hopes had already begun to fade, when two columns of black smoke appeared over two of the Japanese battleships—the second and fifth in line—greeted by a tremendous roar from the crews of our ships. One and all had seen the event, even stokers sticking out in a cluster from the hatches, except, of course, myself, who had to choose this precise moment to go below to smoke a cigarette to allay my frayed nerves. Immediately all became movement on the enemy side, but movement of a kind that looked very much the opposite to the calm assurance of a few moments ago, and before the signal from our Captain (D) had been acknowledged, both our flotillas went in to attack. A sharp, and for some a very sharp, though rather disorderly encounter, lasted on and off for about two hours, but again superior numbers and heavier armament told and we were forced back. We disengaged with little damage and no loss of life, but with the certainty that one battleship was sunk and the other limping off under heavy escort.

Having taken part in a score of scraps at sea of various intensity I have come to this conclusion: that, as a general rule, in those days at least, the very comforting bad marksmanship as compared with target practice, of the enemy in action, was

matched by the same on one's own side, with, of course, the exactly opposite effect on one's feelings.

The snag to our minesweeping activities came when toward the middle of the summer the Japanese had the nasty inspiration of adjusting a few mines to a shallower depth, dangerous to destroyers. Nearly all of us came to our end on these hazards, amongst them the *Silny*, with its companion ship, the *Stremitelny*. In our case it was even worse because we struck mines a quarter of an hour apart from each other.

The *Stremitelny* went down first, and so quickly that we just managed to save her officers and crew, amongst them several wounded. The captain and three officers were put in the Captain's cabin and the wardroom, one of them in my bunk, his face a bloody mess, and we were all sure that he was dying. As we got under way towards the harbour, I was standing over the wardroom companionway, with the Torpedo Chief Mate two yards from me, when suddenly—I cannot describe it otherwise—something occurred. There was no noise but a certain commotion in the air, and a heavy mixture of water and various objects started a moment later to rain down from above. A little way forward and turning up the collar of his tunic our Engineer-Lieutenant was squatting on his haunches, and I caught myself doing the same. I glanced back and there was the body of the Torpedo Mate coming down a few yards away and hitting the water with a great splash. Another amazed glance aft showed me that there was nothing but water in that direction, except for a bit of the steel structure of the destroyer, visible just above sea level, on which two sad figures in blue were perching. They were two Chinese dockyard workers, whom we carried at the time to complete the foundation of our heavier rear gun.

The mine had gone off right under our wardroom, and killed two survivors of the *Stremitelny* just salvaged by us. The

whole rear part of the destroyer had obviously gone, but the watertight partition held, and we were still afloat, and settled down to wait for the tugs to take us in. This particular moment was chosen by our mess steward, a devoted but not very bright fellow, to try to get down into what had been the wardroom to fetch a greatcoat for me, as I was wet and had to be protected from the cold. He got half-way down, and suddenly came back: "Mr. Jacobovsky is down there in your bunk, sir, with his eyes swivelling round." So out we got Jacobovsky and, three weeks later he was as hale and sound as ever and so was the Torpedo Mate after his involuntary dive. Finally we were towed in and berthed—a derelict for ever, and that ended my going to sea for the time being.

I was posted straightaway to the battleship *Pobieda*: this ship had become a pool for officers and men from ships lost or put out of action, intended to reinforce the garrison. The investment of the fortress had become very close indeed by this time: though all the forts and redoubts of the perimeter were still firmly held. The Japanese in some cases were already in the moats of these, and all along the line the distance between the opposing trenches was hardly ever more than 150 yards, and on quite a few stretches as close as 30 yards. It should be mentioned here that at the beginning of the war the permanent works of the fortress were only partly completed, especially on the north-west sector where a dominating height had not yet been crowned with the very strong fortifications planned for it. During the first months of the siege whilst the advance of the Japanese investing forces was still being slowed down on successive fortified lines across the Lio Tung peninsular, everything possible was done by the engineers of the garrison, with the limited materials at their disposal, to fortify this position, commonly called the High Mountain. The loss of this height to the enemy would mean the certain destruction of our remaining battleships in the harbour by accurate observed fire



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from the heavy mortar siege train at the enemy's disposal. From the inner harbour or indeed from everywhere inside the crescent-shape territory of the fortress, the sugar-loaf of the High Mountain stood out in all weathers conspicuous to everyone as the key to it. At the time it resembled, from the distance, nothing more than a volcano in a state of moderate activity, wreathed continuously with a mixture of white, black and brown eruptions and puffs, forming a cloud of varying shape replaced at night by an equally impressive display of fireworks.

It was at my first, and one and only, breakfast on board the *Pobieda* that the order reached me to proceed forthwith to the High Mountain to take over the remains of two naval companies and a detachment of machine gunners which had lost all their officers in the last twenty-four hours, taking with me a relief detachment of about sixty ratings. In an hour, having hastily equipped myself by borrowing a service revolver from the *Pobieda's* armoury, my own officially having been lost on the *Silny*, but in reality forgotten on one of my Baltic ships, I girt myself with my sword and was on my way at the head of what only could be termed a motley crowd of excellent sailors, whom I had never met before and who had had no infantry drill, or handled a service rifle since they were recruits at Naval Barracks at Kronstadt. The same applied equally to me.

Our three-mile march to the foot of the mountain was accomplished in comparative comfort. At the foot of it I reported to the Sectional Commander, and we started our climb up the very steep slope, heavily under fire. What with sheltering in various bits of half-destroyed trenches it took a longish time to reach the top and the network of half obliterated trenches that covered it. I went to the dugout sheltering the Mountain Commandant, a placid but rather sardonic Lieut.-Col. of the 6th Siberian Rifles, who had had the whimsy idea of marking by little black patches the holes made by three

previous wounds. He of course never left the Mountain alive, and knew it at the time. He said to me: "I am certainly glad you have come, but I'm afraid you'll have a difficulty in finding your men. I think there are thirty left of the two companies, all over the place. Leave the relief here for the moment, and go round alone," and then called for the inevitable sapper to take me round. I found about thirty men, in a number of foxholes, as they are known now, with the enemy about twenty yards away. They seemed tired but not particularly preoccupied, and had nothing to do other than sit quietly in as sheltered positions as they could find. So the time passed in making the rounds, mostly on all fours and periodically reporting to the Command Post, which was in a comfortable dugout, still well provided with both food and drink. Here, for the first time, I made contact with that admirable body of men, the officers of the Siberian Rifles, to whom no word of praise, of mine at least, can ever do justice.

Some time during the middle of the night that followed, it transpired that a group of Japanese had broken through to the summit, and, sure enough, rifle bullets began to spatter the entrance to the Command Post. It so happened that I was the only officer available to the Commandant at the time, and I was told to take the few men I had in reserve, in a nearby trench, and throw the Japanese out. Forward came the sapper again, and I proceeded to do as I was told. After a few words of encouragement to my men, who did not seem to be particularly enthusiastic about the prospect before them, we all crawled the few yards separating us from the hillock occupied by the Japanese, and from there, with a rather feeble chorus of "Hurrahs" rushed upwards. Wildly firing my revolver at anything remotely suspicious on my way—my sword I should mention I had thrown away after it snapped between my knees during our climb up the mountain—I was met on reaching the crest by a blinding flash of a primitive hand grenade: at the time

they were still home-made by both sides, of sardine tins and such. I immediately fell down and lost consciousness. As a small scratch on the palm of my right hand was the only damage I sustained I am still in grave doubt as to the real cause of my faint. However, my men having speedily bayoneted the three Japanese who had caused all the trouble, our task was accomplished, and my still unconscious body was successfully dragged back to the Command Post and comparative safety. This episode was to remain the highlight of my fighting experience on this particular position and on land generally. The rest of my time on High Mountain was passed monotonously in literally counting my losses and waiting for relief which, none too soon, arrived forty-eight hours later. I led about a hundred men back, out of nearly four hundred of my supposed command, down the mountain for a rest period at some sheds, meant for temporary barracks, some six miles away, just outside the old town.

On the way down I had a curious experience: heading the straggling Indian file of my men along a very dusty road I observed on the surface in brilliant sunshine little puffs of dust such as heavy rain produces. It took me some time to realise they were not raindrops at all, but bullets—a quite disagreeable discovery at the time.¹

For the rest of the siege my company, brought up to full strength, was mainly working, in more or less exposed positions, usually at night, on trench maintenance and the like, and temporarily occupying various trenches, mostly in the second line. From one of these I saw one day the No. 3 Redoubt blown up, the first of the permanent works of the fortress. The explosion was immediately followed by lines of tiny figures scurrying down the hillside towards the section of the trenches held by my company, and as they were just within extreme range I joined my men with a rifle, the only time in my life that I have used a firearm on a human target. At once,

of course, we were relieved by Siberian Rifles, and reached the Command Post an hour later. I was there just in time to hear the two telephonists of the 3rd Redoubt, who, apparently in the confusion following the explosion, had not yet been discovered by the Japanese, asking leave over the wires to destroy their apparatus and surrender, having, as they reported, unsuccessfully tried all possible means of escape.

The above is about all that stands out clearly in my memories of, on the whole, a wearisome and in no way hopeful mode of existence. It must not be forgotten that by that time the commissariat was reaching its lowest level: potatoes having disappeared in midsummer, with all green vegetables soon to follow, fresh meat gave place to the salt tinned stuff, with pickled cabbage, rice or millet to supplement it. This soon nearly gave out too and all that was left were the artillery and train horses of the garrison, in very short supply, and finally, about two months before the end, even the bread or biscuit rations were reduced to about a quarter of their regulation size. Since those days potatoes, previously avoided by me in any form, became my favourite food at every meal. This scarcity of food, more than anything else, I think, without directly effecting their fighting qualities, gradually weakened the men's will to resist, and was a powerful factor in inducing the surrender of the fortress, much criticised at the time.

The very last period started when one morning the big guns of battleships in harbour opened up at midday, and we saw their shells reducing the top of the High Mountain to shambles—this stronghold having fallen at last during the previous night and morning. The shelling was intended of course to prevent the Japanese from establishing an observation post so dangerous to ships, but it could not be kept up for long at an effective pace, and sure enough, soon the fire of the Japanese heavy mortars began to tell and achieve results on the ships. A few days later, my company again occupying the same trench

opposite No. 3 Redoubt, I was at the Command Post of the Sector, when suddenly complete silence fell, and we knew the end had come. At that moment a stretcher was brought in, and on it young Voronzov-Villiaminov, mortally wounded by a bullet through his chest. He was my sole platoon commander, and as I bent over him he opened his eyes and said: "Why is it so quiet?" and then turned his head away and died. He must have been the last man killed in that siege. He was from Tambov too, and I had promised his people to look after him when he first joined the 1st Pacific, just before the war started.

Soon came the order to leave the positions and march the men to barracks, and on the way back we met various other detachments under the same orders. One or two days' desultory waiting ensued and as junior officers on the land front were completely, or very nearly, out of contact with the fleet proper, I know little about the various happenings there just before the surrender: even of such relatively important events as the taking out to sea during the last night, and the scuttling in deep waters of the battleship *Sebastopol*, undertaken by her commander, Captain Essen, if not against, then certainly not with, an order to do so. As to what happened to the military garrison we never discovered, in fact we never saw them again. I must not fail to mention here that of the 60,000 men of the garrison of Port Arthur only 20,000 hale men marched out into captivity. For nearly a year they had tied up by their resistance Japanese forces at least three times their number and inflicted, by the enemy's own admission, enormous casualties on them.

And so it came about that on a wintry but sunny morning all the naval personnel, officers and men, were assembled on a flat ground just above the "new city." There we all stood, the few thousand of us, in a hollow square, with the Command Staff in the middle, and soon a group of Japanese general officers appeared and stopped not far from our Command. Two figures detached themselves, respectively accompanied by an A.D.C.,

approached each other, saluted, shook hands, and having exchanged a paper, rejoined their own sides. The order came for officers to step forward, and the Russian Chief of Staff read out the conditions of surrender, which were short and to the point.

It was an "honourable" surrender, as I think they were termed in those days, and everyone in the care of the Red Cross and medical personnel were to be repatriated unconditionally: officers to keep their swords as a mark of honourable distinction, and to have the unprecedented, at least in modern times, privilege of choosing between becoming a prisoner of war, or returning home on parole not to take part in active service until the end of the war. That was a poser, and permission was sought by our C.-in-C., and granted, to ask the Emperor's decision on the point. On this we dispersed and led our men to quarters assigned us by the Japanese in the new town. The Emperor's answer, which was announced early next day, granted a free choice to us all: and I am proud to say that, with very few exceptions, the overwhelming majority chose to stay with the men as prisoners of war. Later the same day this was told the men on parade, and was greeted by what I feel were very sincere acclamations from them: but if those cheers indicated their satisfaction at having us with them, they were soon to be disappointed. The very next day we were segregated from them, except for a few stewards, and in captivity we never saw them again.

The Russian ratings, petty officers included, were all conscripted at twenty-one for five years active service, and fifteen years in the reserve, with only a few long-service men amongst them, and those mostly on auxiliary craft serving the base ports. They came from all over the wide expanse of peasant Russia, with the exception of the shores of the White Sea in the extreme north, whose population, the sole seafaring one, were exempt since the days of Peter the Great, as essential to the development of the fisheries in those parts.

These peasant lads, the large majority of whom had never come within hundreds of miles of any shore, surprisingly enough took to the sea with the greatest ease, and produced excellent sailors in all branches of the Service. And this was the same even in the days of sail, when the life was much more exacting from a sailor's point of view than in the present mechanised conditions. I always was, and still am of the opinion that the peasant's infinite variety of duties on the land make him also the most intelligently adaptable subject in any other skilled occupation, and this contention of mine, though flying in the face of the universally accepted appreciation of the "backward peasant lout," was proved correct in the case of nearly all our ratings with whom I came into contact.

Shortly afterwards, the whole body of naval officers below the rank of commander were entrained together, and taken to Dalny, and from there shipped to Japan. On the passenger steamer carrying the party I was with we were berthed singly, or at the most two, in a cabin, and were as free on board as any passenger in normal circumstances. One day I went to the upper bridge, and saw, on the opposite wing a Japanese officer in a Staff Captain's uniform. with a high bridged nose giving his face an unusual distinction. We observed each other silently, and I felt a great temptation to speak to him, but hesitated; by the expression on his face he seemed to have the same feelings but we both refrained, and simultaneously went below down our sides of the bridge. Later I pointed him out to one of our interpreters and he told me that this officer, on the staff of the C.-in-C., was the Japanese equivalent of a Count, the son of a Minister of State, and that he too had inquired who I was. Stimulated by insatiable and characteristic curiosity we, two scions of a still powerful hereditary minority, nearly succeeded in overcoming the racial gap—but circumstances prevented

this: everything was still too near and too raw to be discussed objectively.

In due course, after innumerable injections for and against all possible diseases, which, by the way, during that year had already been inflicted on us by our own Command, we reached the smallest of the three main islands composing the Japanese Empire. At first we were quartered for a few days at the local Red Cross camp; here, straightaway an incident occurred menacing all our relations with the Japanese. I think it was on the first morning, after the arrival of our party, we were assembled in an empty hospital ward and it was politely, but firmly, announced to us by a senior Japanese officer, that we had to surrender our swords, and that we were to do so now. It was explained that this was a purely administrative measure, in no way prejudicial to our honour, and that the swords would be returned to us, without fail, at the termination of hostilities. Our senior officer, the only Commander amongst us, at once rose in angry protest, supported, of course, in every admissible way, by us all. In no circumstances a man of easy temper, he, on this occasion, very soon lost it completely, which led to a poorly interpreted lengthy discussion and it became really stormy on both sides, when his opposite number's temper also began to give way. In the end our senior flatly refused, on behalf of us all, to obey the order.

A short silence ensued, and a whispered instruction made a Japanese subaltern leave the room, and return a few moments later with a section of armed infantrymen led by an officer in field kit. Once more the squeaky voice of the interpreter was heard, demanding obedience, answered by an emphatic refusal again. A raucous word of command and down on their knee went the front rank of the soldiers, and the rattle of locks was heard as the rifles were loaded, and the officer in charge stepped forward and drew his sword . . . Another tense and silent pause, and then our commander, with one of the rudest curses

of the rich Russian vocabulary, unbuckled his sword and threw it on the table in front of the Japanese. Incidentally, this curse came out in the minutes of the meeting as a perfectly sober, dignified, carefully and even elegantly phrased expression of strong protest under duress. We tried to follow suit, but were prevented by a covey of junior Japanese officers, scurrying around and reverently receiving our swords from our hands. On reflection quite a few of us, including our senior officer himself, thought the order quite reasonable: there is much to be said for a crowd of young men, living in restricted conditions and in enforced idleness, not having arms at their disposal. But it was the way in which the scene was laid, and the phrasing used by the Japanese in their announcement that brought matters to the boil, helped, of course, by the ungovernable temper of Commander Gerassimov.

A few days later we were taken inland to Matsujama, the main centre of the island and, as far as we could appreciate, an insignificant provincial town. A low range of hills, crowned by a large medieval castle built in stone, dominated the rice plain on which the dozen or so streets of the town, with buildings entirely Japanese in style, were situated. The first surprise we had were the quarters assigned us: they were the temples of the town; we never discovered exactly of what religion. The main halls of worship had been made ready by removing the carved sacred figures, and utensils, into cupboards, leaving only a few high up on the walls. They became the main dormitories, with private rooms around them in addition.

Mattresses, sheets and blankets of very good quality indeed were issued, but as the Japanese dispose their bedding directly on the matting covering their floors, no bedsteads; these were promptly constructed by our stewards. The provisions were uniformly plentiful, varied and good, and what is more, their composition of a normal Russian ration, containing about twice as much meat as the Japanese soldier ever saw. We were also

able to supplement them by anything we fancied from the shops in the town, which we could visit ourselves three times a week, under escort of a private of the guard, invariably sympathetic and helpful.

In the particular pagoda in which I spent nearly all the time I was a prisoner, fifty were quartered, all except our senior, below the rank of Lt.-Commander. The flag officers, captains and commanders, were housed separately, and, though allowed with special permission to visit them we very seldom availed ourselves of that privilege. Originally I and another sub-lieutenant, a Prince Galitzine, were intended by the Japanese to be housed either separately or at least with the senior officers, and only with the greatest difficulty were we able to persuade the authorities that our titles did not give us any right to such a distinction. On the whole life was healthy, though very monotonous, and in spite of the complete absence of outdoor games, in no way degrading either to the body or the intellect. Mail from home reached us regularly, though with a certain delay, because censoring seemed to demand a complete translation of every letter into Japanese via an intermediate language, by rather incompetent interpreters: this we discovered because from time to time the translation was left by oversight in the envelope. Books, in all languages and on every subject, were allowed, and could be ordered from Yokohama and Nagasaki. Archbishop Nicholas, the Orthodox Bishop of Japan, supplied us with all the religious works we could desire, and Orthodox Japanese priests ministered to the spiritual needs of both officers and men. We even had an orchestra, of which the brothers Pavlinov were cellist and pianist respectively, and myself on the flute with my friend Lieut. Svinjin on the fiddle formed the kernel. I am sorry to say that our rehearsals were strictly relegated to a pavilion at the bottom of the rather extensive temple garden, and a maximum of one public performance a month tolerated.

For administration we came under Col. Kono, a brisk, breezy and rather fussy Commandant, who had his office in the castle. He was our immediate chief: the regional one, an elderly General, entirely benevolent, and an obvious "dugout," was sometimes to be seen limping about. My first glimpse of this dignitary is perhaps worth recording, as a mute comment on one facet at least, of the fundamentals of Japanese life, with its recent, drastic, but to my mind only superficial, changes. Not long after our arrival, when we were still in quarantine at the hospital camp, I was standing near the main entrance gates when a small and bent figure, in a general officer's uniform, with a strong limp in his right, crooked foot, appeared on his way in, followed by a small suite. As he approached the sentinel at the gate—a young private standing completely at ease—the General slowed down nearly to a standstill, drew himself up as best he could and saluted. The sentinel, now at attention, solemnly presented arms in acknowledgement and the General resumed his path; every sentry in the Japanese army embodied the Emperor himself, and therefore had to be saluted first by all ranks. When we asked where the General had acquired his crooked foot, we were told that he had been wounded by an arrow in the civil war in the 1860s which reinstated the executive power of the Emperor and abolished the Shogunate.

There was hardly any friction with either the Commandant or his staff during my time in Japan, and what there was, was based on misunderstandings mostly owing to differences in outlook and codes of behaviour. For instance, one of our lieutenants, a very brave, but impulsive and hot-headed man, replaced the light bulb in his room, a little carelessly as it proved, for a new one of double the wattage purchased in the town. A week later he was sent for by the "castle," and was thus addressed by the Commandant, through an interpreter: "In the Japanese armed forces it is not customary for officers to steal"; whereupon Aliambokov immediately flew into a rage,

and was with difficulty prevented by the junior staff from bodily assault upon the Colonel; yet all the Commandant had meant to convey was that the excess current used by the larger bulb should be paid for out of the lieutenant's pocket.

On another occasion a very respectable elderly Japanese appeared at the gates of our pagoda, accompanied by twenty boys, in the uniform of military cadets, and requested permission to visit us, which of course was granted, and tea with cakes in the European fashion provided for the visitors. They stayed rather a long time—three hours—trying to converse with us in broken Russian and English. To our astonishment this performance was repeated three days later, and then about twice a week, till our senior officer became rather curious as to this strange persistence. He discovered that the object was—from the Japanese point of view a very meritorious one—to give the boys an opportunity of practising Russian and other European languages. Needless to say when they next appeared they were not allowed in again. There were other incidents of the same nature, but so slight as not to be worth recording, but all pointing to what I should term a considerable gulf between our mentalities.

Galitzine and I had constructed in the main hall, a double tier bunk, where he occupied the upper, and I the lower berth. One day during our siesta the bed began to shake, which usually happened when Alexeii started to get up; I opened my eyes and there were his interminable long thin legs (he was 6 ft. 4 in.) dangling above me. Next thing, in spite of my curses, he slid down and ran towards the entrance of the temple, accompanied by a crowd of silent figures speeding in the same direction. I looked out from the bunk and there were the tall carved double columns supporting the roof, swaying slightly and emitting a creaking sound, accompanied, when the patter of running feet had died down, by a deep rumble proceeding as if from nowhere. I grasped at last what was happening and,

clad in underpants only, rushed for the portal, and out. About twelve steps led down to the courtyard, with in front of them a handcart, loaded high with beer cases. In one flying leap right from the top and over the handcart, I landed in the very middle of the courtyard, with the temple still swaying backwards and forwards in the background. In an earthquake, once you get out from under a roof, you become pleasurably excited, and I was greeted with round after round of applause from my friends on my brilliant performance.

From the streets, through the rumble, we could hear the excited chatter and semi-hysterical laughter of the whole population, who like us, had left their houses and were crowding the streets. Another detail may show how shattering, even to the strongest morale, an earthquake can be. Our guard had disappeared with all their rifles forgotten and entirely at our disposal on the terrace of the guardhouse; even the sentry had left his post. The first severe shock lasted a few minutes; we had another, much slighter, the same evening, and three or four more of diminishing intensity during the week that followed, and the performance of rushing out was repeated every time, night and day by us as well as the entire population.

A few days later when things had gone back to normal some of us were playing cards in our so-called wardroom, when I saw my partner looking up at the electric light bulb above the table, and, with the expression on his face suddenly changing, begin to leave his chair; I followed his glance, and there was the bulb slowly swaying from side to side. In the next instant we were all out in the courtyard, except one observing our antics with sardonic glee from the veranda terrace. He had attached a length of thin thread to the lamp, and skilfully manipulated it from the outside. Being very fleet of foot, he managed to hide in the guardroom, of all places!

One morning our English paper was delivered much earlier in the day, and in several copies, instead of the usual one or two,

and there was the news of the 2nd Pacific Squadron's defeat at Tsushima.

We never met any of the officers of the 2nd Pacific, who were confined in a different place, and perhaps it was as well this was so: and yet we knew that we were unreasonable in our attitude—even amongst ourselves we could only discuss it with difficulty—and this increased the gloom into which that disaster cast us for a long time.

At last the armistice was signed, the war was over, and we settled down to wait for evacuation. On the morning the news came, and we had just had time to let it sink in, a handcart, serviced by two privates and accompanied by a staff captain, drew up in front of the portals of our pagoda. It solemnly bore our swords; we paraded in the courtyard and they were individually handed back to us by the captain, neatly labelled both in Japanese and in Russian, in perfect, though in my case broken, condition. From then on we wore them in the street, and were invariably saluted by all Japanese of inferior rank, but by no means by all of the few stray Russians who were about, and were at liberty to move about and freely contact the natives.

Some of us, tired of communal life,—I was one—rented Japanese houses all over the town. Mine was in a small thoroughfare just off the main street: four stout posts, carved and lacquered, supported a roof of glazed tiles, and the space so covered was walled by movable screens, the upper half papered windows, and surrounded by a veranda. Inside movable screens divided the living space into a number of rooms. All visible woodwork was lacquered, and the movable partitions functioned perfectly so that several combinations of rooms could be instantly arranged and the floor, elevated three feet from the ground, was covered with thick white matting. The furniture I found there consisted of the inevitable cast-iron heating pots, filled with ashes of the smokeless and odourless

cherrywood charcoal, permanently aglow all through the winter, a few head-rests used by Japanese ladies in lieu of pillows to protect their hairdress, and a few Japanese prints on the walls. Flanked by similar ones, my house had a common garden space behind, filled with various flowering shrubs, mostly varieties of the well-known cherry. On the inner verandas of each house stood a square wooden bath, beautifully finished, of pine or cedarwood. About three times a week, the large families of my neighbours, including not a few girls, used these baths with sufficient absence of modesty to allow the appreciation of their beauty in all its aspects. Generally speaking, continuous intercourse by sign language was kept up in a very gay and familiar manner, yet the barrier of basic incomprehension between us never completely broke down.

On the very day I settled in, two individuals presented themselves: one was an elderly Japanese woman, who by signs, accompanied by the customary hissing, explained that she proposed to cook for me, and look after the house in general, the other a rickshaw to drive me about. He, thereafter, most of the time could be found in the street outside. The rent of the house and all these services were incredibly cheap and we could easily afford them, receiving in recompense for Port Arthur full seagoing pay from the Russian Admiralty, in addition to the basic pay provided by the Japanese to prisoners of war. For instance my rickshaw, whom I employed freely, used to arrive on the first of each month, with his bill in the form of a roll, three feet long, with every journey noted in Japanese characters, and yet the maximum I ever paid was 6s.

From the point of view of bodily comfort life was very civilised and agreeable, and there was only one bad moment each day at dawn, when the whole town stank incredibly for a short while. There were no drains in Matsuama, and it was served in that respect by sewage personnel called *Kavakamis*: every morning one of them arrived and transferred the contents

of the earth-closet to a large earthenware pot, which was carried on a little platform on his back. This was taken straightaway to the rice-paddies which merged into the town from all sides. To tell the truth I don't think that the municipal authorities of Matsuama would have been allowed, by the surrounding population, to install any other system of sanitation.

Throughout this six months in purely Japanese surroundings I had one or two curious experiences. One day an elderly bearded Japanese gentleman called on me, and addressing me in good, but very slow German, inquired if I was prepared to do him a favour: being a philosophy teacher at the local college, he had some difficulty in expounding the works of Immanuel Kant. I agreed to do what I could. We started the next morning and soon to my amazement I found out that what he wanted was help not in translation, as I had supposed, but in interpretation of Kant's philosophy—which of course was far above me. Nevertheless I did what I could, and little as it was, it seemed to clear somewhat the complete fog shrouding his knowledge of Western philosophy. He was the only Japanese with whom I had the opportunity of discussing the barrier between our cultures, and he, whilst agreeing with me, could find no obvious explanation for it.

It must have been through one of our interpreters that it became known that I was fond of gardening, because it was through one of them that I received an invitation from a famous grower of chrysanthemums and dwarf gardens, himself a substantial citizen of Matsuama, living in a suburban villa. As my host was a good German scholar I drove out unaccompanied to his residence about six miles out of town on the gentle slope of the low range of hills. This house although four times the size and with the carvings perhaps slightly more *soignée* was the exact counterpart of mine. Introduced into the, as usual, bare interior I was greeted by my host, and given

tea. After a time he clapped his hands and a servant girl brought in a first exhibit, a flowerpot with a single chrysanthemum in it: not a bushy bloom but with petals hanging singly nearly halfway down the stem and of beautiful and varied colours. After the first, successive pots were brought in for an hour or more and I duly hissed in admiration, but very soon each began to look exactly like the other.

Then came the dwarf gardens: there were three of them on the different sides of the house, and I cannot find words to describe the delight they gave me. There would be a lovely landscape on about four feet square, with lakes, water courses and falls, bridges, indescribably well-placed dwarf trees, some twisted and gnarled, others well grown, interspersed by delightful groups of little china figures of men and beasts, with a pagoda-like building in china as the *point de mire* either in the centre or somewhere in a corner. The visit, which at one moment had threatened to become dreary, ended in pure delight, and with many thanks to my host and his lady, who, rather oddly, appeared only at the last moment, I left them, very pleased both with my reception and what I had seen.

I had on the whole a not only interesting but enjoyable time as a prisoner of war, and when my first cousin Count Alexander Hatzfeldt, then attached to the German Embassy at Tokyo, and somewhat disturbed by various rumours about the Japanese treatment of prisoners of war, visited me, I was able to reassure him completely and very sincerely on my own and everyone else's behalf.

It was at the end of 1905 that our evacuation at last began: our little community was broken up, because we went singly, or in twos and threes, to take charge at different ports of parties of ratings being sent back home via Vladivostock. I myself embarked from Kobé, and after an uneventful passage, reached

Vladivostock at the head of a party of men which on arrival instantly disappeared into the administrative chaos prevailing in that city. At that time the first revolutionary troubles in Russia, though subsiding in the European part of the Empire, were in full bloom to the east of Irkutsk; only along the railway line of course, because whatever happened in the tremendous waste of the hinterland, nobody knew or cared. Vladivostock itself, a largish town of 100,000 inhabitants, was full of soldiers of all branches, interlarded with sailors galore. All somehow had plenty of money, and though liquor shops had been officially closed since the beginning of the war, they were seen full of drink and food parading up and down the streets with placards demanding every sort of possible and impossible reform, and interfering with everything that was going on, and all in the spirit of a monumental and gay carouse. Through all this I, with my scanty belongings, speedily made my way to the main railway station, with the hope of wangling, on the strength of Port Arthur, a seat on one of the two fantastically overcrowded trains that started west every day. In this I was lucky and succeeded in securing a place in a first-class compartment.

I was lounging about outside the carriage, peacefully awaiting the always uncertain departure of the train, when out of nowhere a senior R.T.O. appeared, came up to me and asked: "You on your way home?" and on my affirmative answer, continued: "I've an entrained echelon of sailors here—will you kindly take charge of them." This was an order, and I *volens nolens* meekly marched off to join the train assigned me, on a siding about a mile away. I have forgotten, all along, to mention that, since my taking command of the shore company at Port Arthur, I had with me the excellent Kluchevsky, my self appointed batman. He accompanied me in Japan and was now still in attendance proposing to keep his situation at least till we reached St. Petersburg, his native town. It was he who

salvaged my broken sword when I threw it away on the slopes of the High Mountain.

We got to the train, consisting of carriages of the usual "40 men, 8-horse" variety, but which had attached to it a delicious, small first-class carriage, with four compartments and rear sitting-room, equipped with washbasins, samovars and similar luxuries. Kluchevsky immediately took possession of it, and in about an hour I was installed in incomparable comfort, and was at liberty to send him along the train to assemble a few chiefs or petty officers through whom to administer the unruly assembly entrusted to my care. It all worked out quite well, and two days later with a full complement of about 700 men, we started slowly on our journey home.

The journey proceeded from one republic to another: no sooner had we left, after a short stay of a day or so, a republic centred in the railway junction of Pogranitchna, when the territory of the Chita republic loomed before us. Here we stuck for four days, and I was lavishly entertained by the executive revolutionary committee which at that time ruled that part of the late Empire. It included two brave colonels of the East Siberian Cossacks, with their tongues to be sure very much in their checks, and some foremen from the nearby mines. One thing I do remember with gratitude and delight: at last, after what seemed years there were girls about again and able on occasion to be kind to me, and I seldom left a stopping place unaccompanied till the next, a day or two away.

And so our interminable progress, which as far as I can remember lasted all of three weeks, continued towards the capital of Siberia; not that I was left undisturbed in my command the whole time. Twice at least officers of field rank, stuck along the line for some reason or another, took over my position: in the case of a naval Commander the process was direct and peremptory. Returning at dawn and I am afraid not alone from a town my echelon happened to be visiting at the time, I found

him fully installed in my carriage and was forcibly made aware of my downfall by being told never to be so late again. An Army colonel, on the other hand, asked for a seat as a favour, of course immediately granted. In both cases, however, the interlopers left me in a very short time to board a westbound passenger train overtaking us on the way.

At last we reached Irkutsk where the whole atmosphere changed rather drastically: to begin with we were back in the Russian Empire, the town still under its Governor General, and everyday life quite orderly, in fact approaching the normal in time of war. Yet, in one aspect, things still left much to be desired: wireless still nearly a quarter of a century away, we continued to be very much in the dark as to what was happening in the outside world. On the way, even in Vladivostock, nothing whatsoever could be gleaned from the local papers and broadsheets, concerned only with the home news of the various republics; on the other hand, that universal Russian grapevine—the railway telegraph—owing to the distance, I suppose, was functioning very feebly and intermittently indeed. In Irkutsk both sources of information were much more adequate, enough at least to bring me back to earth from the paradise of a carefree chaos I had been revelling in. I began to worry about what lay in store for me on my eventual homecoming, and in particular as to what had, or was, happening, to my family, relations and friends. The papers, while giving plenty of news relating to Turkestan, or the Caucasus, to the Ukraine, or Poland, were ominously silent about the capitals, whilst on the other hand the railway telegraph nervously chattered about Moscow being in the hands of the proletariat after an armed rising, with St. Petersburg, precariously held by the old Government, sure soon to follow suit.

Peter Wrangel, a reserve cavalryman, having left his post to join the Army, was not available for consultation, so I, having discovered from a news item that my uncle, Count Voronzov-

-Dashkoff still held his post as Viceroy of the Caucasus, took what I felt desperate action. One day my distinguished relative, very much astonished, received a telegram giving as my return address the R.T.O. office at Irkutsk, inquiring about the fate of my parents, brother and sister, and relatives, intimating by its tone that I was prepared for the worst. The answer duly arrived the next day: it said that my parents were still in London, but expected shortly in St. Petersburg, where my sister was spending the season, while my brother, recently back from the war, was passing his leave coursing in Tambov with his cousin (one of my uncle's sons).

Back to normal in fact, with a vengeance, and in another week, on the thirty-sixth day of my journey, I, with my charges, reached Ufa, near the frontier of Siberia, and reported my echelon at the Dispersal Centre. We parted without regrets, and anyway about half the men had vanished when the petty officers tried to parade them outside the station. I had a farewell supper with the chiefs, and with their kind help, by no means superfluous, boarded the train for a normal forty-eight-hours trip to Moscow. The last days of my journey with the echelon, together with the telegram from my uncle, had proved to me that all the news along the route had been grossly exaggerated, and yet I was not quite prepared for the fact that my journey from Ufa would be so normal, with all the life along the line the same. Not only was the train on time but newspapers reached us from the capitals and did not show that anything was particularly amiss.

My complacency received nevertheless a severe shock the very day I arrived in Moscow. I was met at the station by my sister, then a girl of eighteen and indeed spending her first season in St. Petersburg, who had hurried to Moscow to greet the returning warrior. We went, of course, straight to the old Hotel Dresden. The square in which it stood contained also the Governor General's palace, and opposite the eighteenth

century combined fire and police station; everything, on this early afternoon, seemed normal. And yet, not a quarter of an hour after our arrival, it was announced that Prince Peter Volkonsky and a gentleman would like to see me, and there was my cousin Peter, greeting me effusively, and at the same time introducing his companion as the Examining Magistrate for very important cases, who wanted a word with me in connection with what had happened the same morning.

The then Governor General, Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich (the Tsar's uncle), was leaving his palace on the way to church, when a bomb was thrown under his carriage by an unknown bystander. The explosion killed the Grand Duke and the terrorist outright. The murderer was wearing the uniform of a naval officer, and my cousin, attached to the Governor General's staff, who knew I was arriving that day, suggested to the Examining Magistrate that I might perhaps help in the identification of the man. I was taken by the two of them across to the police station. There in the morgue in a wooden coffin on straw, I saw the body of a man with the top of his head entirely gone, but the features untouched and quite composed. —He was young, very dark, and obviously of Jewish or Caucasian parentage and indeed was wearing naval uniform. Of course I couldn't identify him. I had been away for four years and said so, but very soon it was discovered who he was. In those days terrorists seldom made a secret of their identity, and it was found that he had only used the naval uniform as a disguise.

Although I knew that terrorists' acts of every description were quite frequent in the past year, the impact of this personal experience showed me how much I was out of touch with present conditions in Russia, and how my purely naval life had abstracted me from the whole flow of events, and it was in a sober mood of doubt and uncertainty that I reached St. Petersburg a day or two later. I had already decided to leave the

Navy and to enter public life, which in Russia of those days, meant local government, and a return to Sosnofka.

To achieve this, two things were essential: to become a Councillor of the District and the Provincial Assembly of the Zemstvo, and—more important—try to achieve the position of District Marshal of Nobility. The elections for all these were due in the course of the next year; and neither required any extensive canvassing or nursing, except contact with influential local circles, promptly and very easily established by a few visits to my home province. I therefore decided to follow a suggestion of my father's to avail myself of an unequalled opportunity to see something of England and also get the feel of the international situation in Europe. To cut a long story short, I did not immediately resign my commission, but was seconded by the Navy to the Foreign Office, to be attached temporarily to the staff of my father's embassy in London.

CHAPTER III

LONDON INTERLUDE

TO London I proceeded, duty bound, to join the staff of the embassy as supernumerary attaché—I might as well mention here that all through the twelve-month that my connection with diplomacy lasted, my official duties were those of a cipher clerk, and not a very busy one at that. I had therefore more than sufficient leisure to explore the English scene as it was in those days. To do so ample opportunities presented themselves, and those of a kind seldom vouchsafed to a young foreigner with a very sketchy knowledge of the native tongue.

The distant but well remembered family connections between the Shuvalovs and the Herberts—that eminently and characteristically English family of peers and commoners—having helped my parents to achieve in a short while an unusually privileged position, seldom granted to foreigners, now helped me in turn.

It seems to me that there is one feature in the life of English society which not only distinguishes it from the social customs prevailing on the continent, but plays, and even more so in the days I am writing about, a decidedly important part in the political life of the country—the week-end party. Though on the face of it designed for rest and leisure, it is at the same time a means of achieving seclusion, very useful and sometimes even essential for the proper conduct of all kind and manner of affairs: from the lofty heights of politics, down to matchmaking in all its aspects, aboveboard and the reverse. No social events in town could equal the opportunities offered by a week-end

party with its undisturbed leisure and possibility of sleeping on pending decisions, whatever their nature. Not that my first introduction to house parties could let me guess in the remotest degree how fond I should become in the end of this form of hospitality.

To one fresh from the Pacific and the manners of a destroyer's wardroom, a Whitsuntide party at the Earl of Pembroke's seat, Wilton, was nothing less than an awe-inspiring experience, apt to shatter completely the morale of an aspiring young man about town.

One fine afternoon in late May, a magnificent carriage and pair complete with liveried foot- and coachmen took my parents, my sister Nathalie and myself at a majestic and somewhat leisurely pace over the few miles which separated Wilton from Salisbury. We were followed at some distance by a vehicle called, I was told, a "brake", containing my mother's lady's maid and my father's *chasseur*, superintending quite a considerable amount of heavy luggage. Already on the platform, and later as we were taking our seats in the carriage, a not inconsiderable stir had been caused amongst the railway staff, and a few isolated passengers even formed the semblance of a tiny and respectful crowd, sternly controlled, nevertheless, by a railway policeman. On this occasion for the first time, the stationmaster's top hat and its flourishes impressed themselves unfavourably on my attention; its incongruity after all these years still disturbs me and I continue to hanker after its continental counterpart, the red cap.

In about half an hour our steady progress brought us to our destination as the carriage swept up the drive and stopped at the front entrance of the great mansion. On the steps we were met by our host and hostess—a quite exceptional courtesy, I believe, due probably to my father's position as Ambassador—and were conducted to our apartments (even I had a separate sitting-room) to tidy up for tea; this, apparently, was already

in progress in the garden at the back of the house. In due course we joined these twenty or so people of all ages, and we plunged, without introduction of any kind whatsoever, into their midst. My sister Nathalie, quick off the mark as usual, immediately left me to fend for myself amongst an assembly of strangers so indifferent, in manner at least, to my presence, that they seemed calmly hostile.

My distress began then and there and continued the rest of the day, culminating at dinner: my neighbours were two young females, very attractive indeed, but whose halting French was only equalled, if not surpassed, by a sort of stutter emitted by me in lieu of English. Who they were I don't know to this day, and I never met either of them again, a circumstance partly explained by the fact that they were local ladies and not members of the house party. On dragged the evening through an interminable session with port—a beverage which never could conquer my natural aversion to sweetness and cloyiness in wine—to end in joining the ladies in the drawing-room, and here at last the long-desired relief came, and in such a charming fashion that it made forever after the previous painful experience seem worthwhile.

The daughter of the house, Lady Muriel Herbert, had apparently noticed something of what was going on in me, and, in the kindness of her heart, decided to come to my rescue: she promptly engaged me in, oh, blessed relief, perfect French. Contact of the most animated kind was speedily established and soon we somehow drifted out of the drawing-room to find ourselves eventually on the imposing central staircase of the house, at that hour completely deserted. Proposing to sit down for a while on the steps Lady Muriel asked me for a cigarette: two shocks to me, because (a) I had been told that smoking was not allowed anywhere in the house, except in the billiard room, serving as smoking room—the complete absence of ashtrays anywhere within reach proved that this rule was meant to be

taken seriously—and (b) because I was not yet aware of the custom of choosing a preferably deserted staircase for a conversation of any degree of intimacy: a habit, as I since discovered with ever increasing satisfaction, prevailing in this country, if hardly anywhere else in the world.

But my qualms were soon allayed when Lady Muriel proceeded to give me a fascinating lecture on the habits, manners and idiosyncrasies of the mysterious islanders, by whom I was surrounded; and such was the verve and the wit she displayed that I completely lost my heart to her then and there—as a teacher at least. She did not seem to mind that, because when we parted everyone else had gone to bed. Whenever we met in after life—which, was, alas, much less frequently than I, at least, would have liked—we each invariably referred to that evening; she still amused by the degree of distress in which she had found me, and I to thank her again for her inestimable lecture.

So heartening was the effect of that beautiful and benevolent creature's discourse that not only did I thoroughly enjoy the rest of my stay, but even appreciated all the quaintness of Sabbath observance there, such as its Sunday walk which duly included visits to stables and kennels, and all the rest of it—still observed very strictly by the whole party at Wilton if hardly anywhere else, as I was soon to discover.

On Tuesday morning this important episode—my introduction to social life in England—drew to its close, and the carriage took us back to the station in time for the morning express to London.

But it was Maurice Baring, ever since my father's Copenhagen days a close and dear friend of our family and of myself in particular, who took me in tow. He did this to such good purpose that soon I not only made the acquaintance of a great number of people in the most varied walks of life, but was well under way to form ties of close and lasting friendship with a number of them—of both sexes, of course.

Thus the foundation was laid of a bond which grew steadily through the years before the first world war, to become permanent a few years later. Need I say that with the initial social unease soon overcome by the end of my first London season the impact of a new circle of friends and acquaintances was nothing less than tremendous. The chief attraction of this circle was the ebullience of its intellectual life and range of interests: politics, both national and international, every kind of social problem, art in all its manifestations, however unorthodox and extreme, were constantly discussed and supported by convinced and staunch protagonists. All this in an atmosphere of complete and amiable tolerance disturbed occasionally by violent explosions, which however soon proved to be no more than a storm in a tea-cup.

The more I became involved in the political life of my own country the clearer the reason for this tolerance became to me—the hands of these people were still firmly grasping the tiller, and, what is more, they were convinced that nothing serious was threatening their hold. On the whole it was a progressive set and in some matters even radical, but with a note of paternalism never entirely absent, due no doubt to the same cause: namely the feeling of unshakeable security of tenure.

It can be imagined how interesting and fruitful such connections would be to a socially extremely curious young man with political prospects at home, the more so as the various houses were each in its sphere representative of the ruling few of this country at work and play.

Literature and belles-lettres in general were all centred for me at Mells. Soon after my father's appointment as Ambassador in 1900, Maurice had introduced my mother to the circle known as the "Souls," where she soon found her place. Mrs. Horner was one of the most prominent figures in this vague agglomeration of kindred spirits who, though not neglecting politics had their chief interests in belles-lettres and the arts.

That I had established friendly relations with the younger generation of Horners was therefore natural; I think too it was a highly developed sense of curiosity on both sides for anything out of the common run that brought us together. What mainly distinguished the atmosphere at Mells was the extraordinary nonchalance—Frances Horner had a wonderful capacity, while appearing herself a rather busy and slightly worried hostess, of inducing the rest of the household to take things as they came. All this with, in the background, Mr. Horner, seldom visible out of his study, and then nearly always silent; until, all of a sudden, reliable information would be in demand during one of the interminable discussions which, day and night, occupied the minds and tongues of all the inmates of Mells. He was then the person who in answer to a direct question would come out of his day dream, look up and muttering "Let me see," disappear for about ten minutes into his study and return to deliver a little lecture on any point under the sun, full of the most precise and relevant information. At Mells I stayed all through the years whenever I could, and for much longer than week-ends, and I can truly say that the recollections of these visits are amongst my happiest.

I am diffident to continue listing the many houses which gradually came within my orbit, but I must mention the Mannors', both at Arlington House and at Avon Tyrrell. For my London dancing season I depended entirely on the first, and for quiet sport in the country on the latter.

At Coombe the atmosphere was different again; it was a villa and there were hardly any house-parties there, but the many functions were attended from town. It was, I should say, the invasion of the London theatre by the Russians, under Diaghi-leff's aegis, which first brought me to Coombe. It was marvellous to watch with what poise Lady Ripon used to deal with her only too numerous theatrical guests—a tribe which is notoriously difficult to control and, as often as not, to appease,

especially when in company. It was at Coombe that one evening I partnered Mme. Karsavina in a valse: always a very indifferent dancer myself, I was profoundly impressed by the ease with which the tempered steel springs, which purported to be the legs of that small creature, dealt with my not inconsiderable bulk as we swept round the floor with incredible speed, and I hope, grace.

Lady Ripon had scant support from her husband in her task of entertaining the Russians. Lord Ripon, premier shot in England, only cared about his obligations towards that position; with a large garden party swirling round him, he could be seen practising with two loaders in the middle of the lawn in front of the house to prepare for the coming shooting season.

At the Wharf, the Asquiths' home, politics were in full and exclusive sway. It was there, in the summer of 1914, that after dinner over port Mr. Asquith, then Prime Minister, asked me, after someone had brought up the subject of the assassination at Sarajevo the day before, what I thought of it. Incontinently I started on an impassioned harangue—the arguments of which would certainly not have found my father's approval—expressing the view that in this question Mitropa (Mittel Europe) would find Russia not only united but entirely intractable. Mr. Asquith listened to me with some attention, ruminatively sniffing, as was his wont, through his rather prominent nose, but kept his counsel to the end. But there was no such restraint on the part of the rest of the table, nearly all of them of my generation and close friends. They vociferously jumped down my throat from various angles, the excellent port having made its way round the table several times. The interminable and acrimonious discussion raged for so long that the most attractive guests, dispatched at last by Mrs. Asquith to persuade us to join the ladies, had every difficulty in fishing us out of the dining-room.

On high ground near Ringwood, an open space in the New

Forest is dominated by the cube of a three-storied house, with a thing called a gazebo on its roof. There is no garden or any sort of enclosure around it, it has no particular style and anywhere in a town would not attract one moment's attention.

An inn and two or three small cottages lie on the other side of the cross-roads on which the house stands. Such was Picket Post, the house of Bron Lucas. Not far away, effectively hidden at the bottom of a valley by the surrounding and encroaching trees was the home of his youth, an agglomeration of small buildings which his father, the modern hermit, had built in the course of his life in the very depths of the Forest.

To Picket Post all my friends and I used to foregather from time to time and in various combinations to take a rest—I don't know precisely from what, perhaps from family and society. Bron was an extremely energetic and domineering host, and one had great difficulty in avoiding the more strenuous pursuits at our disposal, such as riding the poorly disciplined forest ponies or taking a swim in all weathers in the newly established swimming pool at the bottom of a steep ravine, a quarter of a mile away from the house. But if one was lucky or astute enough to escape these strenuous pastimes—and for me riding always was a means of locomotion rather than of exercise for the liver, and the steep climb back after a dip, especially on a grilling summer afternoon, a thing to be avoided at all cost—left to our own devices the kindred spirits had a very good and indeed restful time.

At Picket Post my long walks with Donald Tovey and the hours spent in interminable discussion about the meaning of music and its influence on nearly all forms of human activity gave me quite a different and much deeper appreciation of my favourite art than I was capable of before. It was not only Donald's incomparable knowledge that fascinated me: it was his extraordinary power to put his finger squarely and lucidly on problems that musical thinking inevitably engenders which

in later life made things so much easier for me when, for a while, music became my dominant interest.

As night came and Bron had reassembled his guests, a sort of intellectual carouse would begin, consisting of a series of sharp skirmishes where no subject, even the most outrageous, was barred, as long as it led to an argument. Those arguments would often go on deep into the night when sometimes the rising tempers would be cooled by a moonlight ride through the Forest—it must be admitted that the more an opinion or a theory flew into the face of all existing evidence, the more welcome it would be as a subject at Picket Post. The contention, for instance, that the earth was flat, and that the contrary was impossible to prove, was at one time a favourite one of Maurice Baring's, with, I think, Hilaire Belloc amongst others in strong support, while I, the professional navigator, led the opposition. The strange thing was that the ring of bystanders, which for once included Bron, seemed to have no strong conviction one way or the other, and were more impressed by the ingenuity of an argument than by its factual merit.

This brings me to an observation on the education of nearly all the public school and university men with whom I came into contact in those days. Superbly trained to use their brains deductively, they appeared to me to give a minor place indeed to any factual scientific knowledge, of the kind that would be at the disposal of every secondary schoolboy on the continent. These hereditary landowners who, moreover, based their political standing on that fact, paid scant attention to the economic side of the exploitation of the land. Nature was observed only for its picturesque qualities: "bird bores" and fly fishermen, with their limited range, perhaps excepted.

For instance, one day in late spring, as four of us were driving through Oxfordshire, I remarked, glancing at a field, that the rye that year seemed to be flowering rather early. Stony and rather suspicious silence was all the answer I got at first, fol-

lowed by an outburst of hilarious appreciation. All my protests were of no avail; the inconspicuous lozenges hanging from the ear which marked the flowering of rye were, after close inspection, dismissed as having neither the shape nor the colouring of flowers, and even the heavenly scent that on a calm evening permeates the transparent cloud over a rye field formed by all the pollen simultaneously released, was entirely unknown to them and disbelieved. This is, of course, an extreme example of the attitude I was to come across only too often; not that I was, in those days, unduly impressed by this or tried to draw any conclusions from it. It seemed to me that, as in those days nearly all the cereal required in England was imported from my country, it was only right and proper that those budding statesmen should concentrate their attention on matters more important than the actual production of food.

The same sort of blank wall of indifference and relative ignorance was met when I occasionally tried to get some sort of idea about the activities of local government in England—all that the county councils were known to be concerned with were roads and their upkeep and very badly, according to my friends, they were doing it. And so it came to pass that my life in Russia, completely wrapped up in farming and local government affairs, had no interests in common with that of my English holidays; so much so that this Russian life always remained to my friends here a closed book. As one of them, and a very dear one it happened to be, put it to me on the eve of my returning home once more: “why is it that when you are gone I have the feeling you have quietly slipped behind a curtain, body and soul? I know just nothing of what you are doing or thinking out there on that vast plain”... And in a way it was so; I myself drew the curtain behind me, preparing perhaps for the tremendous gap which was to divide the life of the two countries. So it came about that whereas in Russia I did not know a single writer, artist or actor, and very few

musicians, in England, especially in later years, I hardly knew anyone else, apart from my more intimate friends. Such constant intercourse, I must say, not only advanced my English beyond all expectations, it did much more than that: it broadened my general outlook on life in a way in which my Russian habits could never have done. There is, it seems to me, no other country where the ruling few mixed so easily with the literary and artistic world that it is impossible to draw any sort of definite line between them,—the English gentleman being as handy with his pen as with his sword—there are so many of them belonging to both worlds.

For me Maurice Baring was the prototype of such a combination, and it was at his house-warming in North Street that a fully representative gathering, with the most wonderful selection of personalities, were present. There fifty gentlemen, ranging from politicians such as Arthur Balfour to men of letters like G. B. Shaw, and of the stage as Beerbohm Tree, graced a large table, under a marquee covering the courtyard in front of the delightful small house—originally, as I was told, the not always respectable retreat of Carolean members of the House around the corner.

The spirits of this party, under the influence of the scintillating display of wit and oratory, and the not less gladdening wine, both in quality and quantity, rose to unprecedented heights. The amiable and noisy chaos that resulted was not quite to the taste of the abstemious G. B. Shaw, who tried to slip away rather early, and I have never seen a man in such a state of disgusted fury as he was when he discovered that he was not able to find his hat, buried under a mound of garments, all thrown in a disorderly heap on the ground. Sem, the caricaturist, sitting all by himself on the corner of a table, included that moment in a series of sketches that he made of nearly all those present—I wonder what happened to them in the end?

My memories of all the proceedings begin rather hazy, one

event, nevertheless, stands out clearly. It came suddenly to Bron Lucas that it was necessary to emasculate the Fabian in H. G. Wells, the operation to be performed then and there. With great energy Bron, against the strongest possible protests from other Fabians, including myself, assumed the rôle of chief surgeon, and with a small crowd assisting him, bodily transported H. G.,—who by that time could offer only very feeble resistance—to the upper regions, and disposed him on a large table. Having taken off their coats and with handkerchiefs round their faces substituting for regulation masks, they went through the motions, making the symbolic act as realistic as possible, if harmless. A most beautiful running fantasia on the piano by Donald Tovey amply quoting the classics from Monteverdi to Debussy introduced and accompanied the scene throughout.

Such male gatherings, large and small, were a constant feature of my English life and in a great measure contributed to my neglect of clubs. In fact, though belonging to several of them such as the Bachelors, the St. James's and the Bath, and sometimes a guest at Brooks's and White's, I had not much use for them; their specific atmosphere being somewhat alien and uncongenial to me. Even my father's favourite, the Beef-steak, where he could be found every evening between nine and eleven, and to which he spared no effort to introduce me, found no favour with me, and yet, according to him, it was "the" place amongst all where one could keep one's finger on the pulse of metropolitan life.

These few recollections are but a feeble effort to draw the outline of my ever growing connections with England, which prepared so well the choice of this country as my adopted home, and cover the ten years which elapsed between the Japanese and the 1st World War. But, of course, all these visits were but a sideline, all through these years, to my life in Russia, to which I shall now return, as I did after my diplomatic year in England.

CHAPTER IV

PROVINCIAL LIFE IN RUSSIA

AND here I was, back in Sosnofka, after an absence lasting practically five years, and, as I hoped then, back for good. By that time my father had handed over to me the full management of all our landed properties in Russia, which consisted of the Sosnofka estate with another smaller one, Pavlodarovka, in the Province of Tambov and the mining property, Lysva in the Urals, of which my mother was a part owner, and where I was a member of the Board of Directors. All that need be said is that at Lysva half the output of platinum in the world was produced yearly.

At the time I took over Sosnofka was an estate of medium size, with about three thousand acres of arable, one thousand acres of river meadows, and four thousand acres of woods. The soil to the depth of 4 feet was black, but being slightly sandy was somewhat less fertile than the fabulous black soil of more southern regions.

The woodlands were managed by a forester: he was a graduate of one of the secondary forestry schools, and, although in our private employ, a civil servant at the same time. In Russia where nearly ninety per cent of the forests were, in any case, State property, their exploitation had been, since the beginning of the nineteenth century controlled by the State inasmuch as an approved plan of cutting and reforestation was obligatory, and the supervision and control of this plan had to be in the hands of qualified personnel responsible to the Forestry Department of the Ministry of Agriculture. Our forester had at his disposal fifteen forest rangers, who were woodmen and gamekeepers combined, and our woods were a mixture of oak,

birch and aspen, with a large preponderance of the first, and except for a few plantations started experimentally by my father, no fir. The most valuable was the oak, which went for innumerable domestic uses, such as barrels, sledge runners and so on, with the soft wood mainly used for firewood.

The forester was also in charge of the drainage of our extensive river meadows. The river itself, the Chelnovaya, though not navigable, was broad and deep, driving water-mills spaced along its course; one of these belonged to the estate and was let to a family of millers who had traditionally held it for several generations.

Millers generally speaking played an important rôle in the life of the peasant population, as they not only ground corn for flour, but husked oats, buckwheat and millet, stamped felt for boots, and even sometimes produced heavy cloth. Usually a miller would receive as his dues the tenth or twelfth part of the produce and he therefore accumulated most of the local marketable surplus of both cereals and wool. In this way in the Russian villages the miller generally became the local banker, to whom in case of need every peasant would go for a loan on the future harvest and for anything he might be short of by the end of winter.

A curious tradition about the tribe of millers was universally accepted in peasant Russia: mill ponds were always reputed to harbour water-maidens and various other sprites, with whom the miller was supposed to be in close touch, with the hardly surprising result that he often became the village healer. In my time this traditional rôle was reduced to a very specific one—fallen maidens now were his main, or even only, clients. But I knew of at least one exception: the mill above ours, in the village of Lamki, was run by an old one-eyed creature, who had the most meaning way of discussing unearthly subjects in a gloomy and harassed manner. In the healing line he had a great reputation for curing syphilis by treating his patients with

quicksilver fumes, a direct precursor, apparently, of the current mercury treatment. His method was to seat his patients on heated stoneware pots, filled with mercury, and cover them with a sort of tent so that they had to inhale the fumes; he must have had considerable success because he never lacked patients, some of whom came from great distances. The local medical profession, who regarded his activities with great suspicion, he fought off stubbornly by means of ample quotations from the Scriptures, in which he was extremely well versed, always pointing to his successes as compared to their failures. But he was the only miller who absolutely refused to help damsels in distress.

The fishing in the river was let to our one and only unpaid river guard, who was supposed to supply the house with a fixed quantity of the better kind of fish, but admittedly we never saw more than one or two largish pike or a mess of perch about twice a year.

Our arable land was divided into three farms. When I took over the whole administration was still carried out in a rather old-fashioned, and to be quite frank, slipshod way. The agents still had one foot in the old serfdom days, and before me, therefore, was the prospect of reorganising the whole thing on more modern and scientific lines.

To begin with, all the buildings were getting old, and there was need for more accommodation. In the first five years I succeeded in building new stables for sixty cart horses and twenty-four brood mares, a piggery for two hundred pigs, and a modern dairy for twenty-four cows. The way it was done was very unlike anything of the same kind in England, the main difference being that all the building materials, except for sheet iron roofs, were produced from the estate by local workmen. The brick was of our clay, fired with our brushwood, and the timber cut and seasoned in our woods, or for the pine, from the adjoining Crown forests. The Crown did not exploit their

forests themselves, but every year put up for auction allotments ripe for cutting: our forester having made his choice according to our needs, would arrange for the cutting and transport by our teams of horses. The plans for the buildings I drew myself, and with the help of various technicians in the employ of the Zemstvo with, on the whole, fair success.

The actual work was done by teams of local people, and in a manner which prevailed all over Russia with regard to artisans, who all worked in large and small teams, based on the same general pattern. For instance, all our carpentry was done, not through a contractor, but by "Uncle Simeon's team," administered by Uncle Simeon himself as the foreman, his brother as the treasurer, and one of his cousins as the cook, with the rest of his men provided from his entire family circle. All were partners who each owned a certain number of shares in the enterprise according to their age, experience and ability. The organisation of these teams was, in broad outline, however big or small they might be, the same all over the country—a voluntary association of peasant smallholders, practising a trade as a part-time occupation: with their land being cared for either by their families or by neighbours share-cropping. The smaller teams used to merge freely with the larger ones when need arose—and dissolved just as easily—so that the system was extremely flexible.

The dockers had the same organisation, and this made itself felt in a curious way during the 1st World War. Archangel having become the main port of entry for arms and war materials from the West needed hundreds of specialised stevedores and dockers for the handling of mixed cargoes which, being normally a timber port, it never employed. All the casual labour that could be assembled there, in the form of labour battalions, was so inadequate that serious blockage threatened. Then one of the chief transport firms revealed the fact that in peace time all the Baltic ports were served by teams of dockers

from, of all places, two districts in the province of Tula, right in the centre of Russia! Most of these men were at the time mobilised and at the front, and the only way to discover their whereabouts was to contact the local "Uncle Simeons". This was done with the result that in two months an adequate number of dockers was picked out from the various front-line units and dispatched to Archangel, where they saved the situation.

Apart from the bigger trades there were all sorts of subsidiary occupations which were organised in the same way. We employed at Sosnofka during the harvest teams of girls from Tula, two hundred miles away. Under the chaperonage of three oldish "aunts", who occupied respectively the positions of forewoman, treasurer and cook, about twenty girls would arrive—all very good field workers, and strictly supervised by the "aunts." They lived in barns and were not allowed to walk out in the village, or have any truck with the locals. We paid the treasurer both in money and in kind; the cook, with some of the girls, provided meals, and the pay was divided, according to ability, by the head "aunt".

As the hay crop in the Caucasus was brought in two months earlier than our own, teams of men from Tambov would go, by special workman's train, to the south, hire themselves out to bring in the hay, and work their way back north, scything all the time, and in due course arrive back home in time for their own hay harvest.

What was always remarkable to me was the extreme ease with which all these collective actions were carried out and how smoothly the traditional rules worked. The other mystery to me was the liaison which allowed the teams to know when and where they were wanted, especially in the building trade. If I tried to find out from Uncle Simeon his answer would be something like this: he was off to Moscow because last Tuesday (market day) he had met Uncle X in the market, who had told

him that he was going to Moscow for certain work. That was all Uncle Simeon would divulge.

This flexible system I have described was entirely traditional and had gone on for hundreds of years, well before railways, when the long distance carting—even as far as the Leipzig Fair—was done in the same way. It is one of the striking characteristics of the essentially peasant population of Russia that it has always been so mobile and so familiar with collective action and responsibility, always on the basis of an absolutely stable and secure ownership of an individual homestead.

The permanent staff of the three Sosnofka farms consisted of the bailiffs, the stable and stud hands, piggery and dairy men, artisans and storemen and the estate office. All these were permanently on the pay roll, but a number of labourers were engaged annually from St. George's Day in April to the Feast of the Virgin Mary in October. The former lived in separate houses, or had apartments in a largish apartment house attached to the Home Farm, whilst the seasonal labourers lived in barracks, closed throughout the winter. Everyone received, in addition to their monthly pay, a full food ration, i.e., flour, meat and fish, vegetables, fresh in summer, pickled or salt in winter, and also butter and milk, all provided from the estate. The permanents cooked at home, while the seasonals organised themselves into the usual teams and shared their food in a canteen. This worked fairly smoothly, even the vegetables were grown and delivered without too much friction with Ivan Petrovich, the gardener, but there was one very sore point—the milk.

The system I took over was that if a family of permanent employees kept their own cow, it was pastured with the estate herd: so an unwieldy and inferior herd of seventy to eighty head had to be managed by our dairy, and taken, in the spring,

every morning through the open season to the meadows, a distance of three or four miles, passing, in an enormous cloud of dust, the very gates of our house, and down the whole length of the village, and returning in the evening by the same route. I put an end to this unproductive and therefore costly organisation by scrapping the whole lot, and organising a herd of twenty-four pedigree cows, with daily delivery of milk to all those who were entitled to it.

This so-called model dairy was entrusted to the special management of my sister Nathalie, who in those days happened to be interested in cows. It had its own staff and office, quite independent from the rest of the estate, and imagined itself as a sort of state within the state. Of course, permanent war was declared with the Estate Office proper, on price of food, produce, etc., charged mutually, and this war was conducted with great spirit right up to the moment when my sister found a husband and I was able to do away with the privileged position of the dairy establishment.

The stud was a much later venture; it produced sturdy artillery and train horses (a cross between an Ardenne and the local breed), and was easily and profitably disposed of at the annual Sosnofka horse fair—an important event in the life of our whole region and even beyond—of which I shall have more to say later on.

The crop rotation adopted on two of our three farms included a matter of some 250 hectares (750 acres) of roots, mainly potatoes, with which there was always the problem of processing, as there was no market either locally or further afield. It was to provide for this need that about fifteen years previously my father had bought the obsolete iron oxide works of Peter the Great's days, and on the site built a starch factory: what with a rather uncertain market for its produce this establishment was functioning not very economically, with its by-product poor feed for livestock. Yet a solution, econo-

mically sound and financially profitable was always available—a distillery producing alcohol, for the basis of the national spirit, vodka.

As in many other countries the production and sale of spirits had in Russia, from time immemorial, been the subject of regulation and general interference by the State, and, consequently, of evasion in various forms by the trade. In Russia at least, conditions had become so shady in the whole industry and it was, therefore, in such bad odour, that it became unacceptable to the majority of land owners. In our particular case, the matter was even worse: sometime during the minority of my father and his brother in the 1860s, when Sosnofka was being administered by trustees, one of the estate agents exploited, in addition to the then functioning distillery, a secret still entirely for his own profit which, to make matters worse, was established in the cellars of the original family seat, right in the middle of the village. Tradition had it that when he found himself on the eve of discovery he destroyed by fire both the distillery and the house, and thereby escaped the worst penalties prescribed by law. Nevertheless heavy fines were imposed on the estate, and the whole affair became one more warning to the land-owning community not to have anything to do with the production of spirits.

But a few years before I took over the whole situation changed drastically: the whole trade in spirits, both production and distribution, became a state monopoly all over the Empire. Henceforward the production was so organised that all the regional refineries were owned and run by the Ministry of Finance itself, whereas the production of raw alcohol was distributed in quotas amongst a whole network of small privately-owned agricultural distilleries, supervised and generally assisted by a special staff of the Ministry. From the beginning the whole operation worked to everyone's satisfaction: the product was excellent, the State derived nearly a quarter of its annual

budget from that source, and even the temperance people themselves could not be but pleased by the nearly complete disappearance of inferior spirits sold irregularly. All the opprobrium attached to the trade vanished, and with a clear conscience, and the assistance of the State, I built a distillery to replace the starch factory, and that major problem was solved.

In harvest time, in addition to the permanent and seasonal staffs some of our labour requirements were supplied by the village community as a whole, who, in exchange for the after-math pasturing of the river meadows, were prepared to come out in a body to deal with our crops. Still vivid in my memory is the sight and sound of a scorching August day, when at dawn three hundred scythe-men would come to a 100-acre field of rye or wheat and by sunset the corn would be down. A day or two later all their women and children would appear at the same field to bind the corn into sheaves. The village were able to do this work without detriment to their own harvesting as their crops, owing to different cultural methods, matured about a week later.

The considerable potato crop was also lifted by the peasantry and carried in their carts to the distillery: for this work they were paid in money and by weight, and most of the manuring was dealt with in the same way.

For the subsidiary crops we kept a few horse-driven harvesters: those were serviced by our own seasonal staff. For the cultivation of the land nearly all the drawing power was supplied by horses, except for deep ploughing—for this oxen were employed: normally we kept thirty head, to provide five teams of three pairs each. They worked for two or three seasons and were then fattened up on the by-product of the distillery. As the dairy farm disposed most of its bullocks to neighbouring communities to serve as village bulls, the current remount of oxen had to be provided, in early spring, from the numerous cattle fairs held in the Don Cossack country—where cattle were

assembled for sale from all over the steppes of the region down to the shores of the Caspian. A foreman with two of our men and two carts would be sent by rail to as near as they could get to the particular fairs favoured. They would buy the required number of oxen, walk them to the railhead, sometimes a matter of a hundred miles or more, and finally reach Sosnofka in time for the animals to be prepared for autumn ploughing; this whole operation took from six to eight weeks. Those oxen provided cheap meat, both fresh and salt, for our staff, with sometimes a slight surplus for sale, and a considerable quantity of manure.

We also kept a small flock of about three hundred sheep—merinos crossed with the local peasant breed—the wool and pelts were sold, and the carcasses reinforced our meat supplies. The lucerne and clover fields of the outlying farms were used as pasture for both oxen and sheep after the hay had been brought in. When, during a mild autumn, the rye sowings overgrew they were fed off by the sheep, thereby strengthening the shallow root system of that cereal with excellent effects on the ensuing crops. It will be seen that all this livestock was subsidiary to the growing of the three main commercial crops, wheat, rye and potatoes.

Not so the pigs: here about 150 to 200 were sold annually, and an important item these were in the revenue of the estate. The breed we favoured was the large white Yorkshires, and the pigs were sold at twelve months old, weighing on an average about 30 stone per head. In the later years I had a contract with a British owned bacon factory at Kozlov, a regional city seventy miles to the south, which paid excellent prices for our produce of sixty head of 15-stoners, and of these we were able to supply three lots in two years. I quite often had to step in personally to prevent the British representative of the factory and my agent, by that time a graduate of the famous Petrovsko-Razoumovski Academy, the leading agricultural college in

Russia, from coming to blows after passionately haranguing each other for hours on the respective methods of feeding bacon pigs.

Lord Ridley's agent kindly undertook to act for me in England in the matter of selecting and purchasing prize boars. The first and the most famous of these had fainted on the platform when being shown at an early age, and thereby missed England's Blue Riband for that particular year, taking only 2nd Prize: this circumstance reduced his price to within the limits I had authorised. I gave this unfortunate failure of a pig the name of Ali Baba—he was the kindest and best-tempered boar I ever met: he actually, when allowed, used to follow me about like a dog, with gentle little grunts from his snout accompanied by the most amiable twinkle of his eyes. Very early in his career, when he and his two English wives, called Fatima and Zuleika respectively, had not long arrived, they were all put in an enclosure in the shade of an oak copse, which was used as a run for the pigs. They had just been driven there, on a very hot summer afternoon, and I was leaning against the railings watching them, when sudden screams were heard from the inside of the copse, and several sows in a state of furious and competitive excitement were seen racing toward the enclosure and Ali Baba. They reached the railings, broke them down by the impact of their impatient bodies, and rushed at him, sitting back on his haunches in a corner, with a bewildered face, flapping his ears, and flatly refusing his co-operation, however urgently required. He weighed over 60 stone when he gaily trotted off to the railway station to be sold for slaughter at the ripe age of eight years.

There were other ways in which Sosnofka, as a farming establishment, had British connections long before my father became Ambassador at the Court of St. James: all our threshers and many other farming implements and machinery had always been ordered from Ransome's. Our intermediary on these

occasions was Mr. King, that firm's agent for the south-eastern part of Russia, who had an office in Moscow. In my time a middle-aged man, Feodor Matveich, as he was universally known, toured his region in the autumn, visiting the bigger estates and even making some of them his temporary headquarters. His Russian was fast, voluble and bad, but he did retail in a picturesque fashion all the social gossip of the land-owning community, down to the most intimate details, and he was always welcome and dearly beloved. For the young bachelors there was another advantage in having him as a friend: when one found oneself short of funds after an impromptu visit to Moscow he was always good for a "popenjay," as the 100 rouble (10 pound notes) were dubbed.

Sosnofka village was a typical settlement of a central province—a region which, by its black soil, belongs to the southern prairie half of the Russian plain, and yet contains considerable expanses of forest, which are a characteristic of the north. It lay in a broad shallow valley on the banks of a small stream also called Sosnofka—in summer a mere trickle—an affluent itself of a larger water-mill-carrying river, the Chelnovaya, which it joined about half a mile south-west of the village.

The southern part of this province was of comparatively recent origin: Tambov itself, the capital, had been founded at the end of the seventeenth century, and as late as 1750 was still considered a frontier post, under whose shelter such settlements as Sosnofka arose in the early eighteenth century. All settlements of that time and kind carried the official status of "appanages"—i.e., special Crown properties nominally, at least, devoted to the upkeep of the reigning dynasty. These all through the latter half of the eighteenth century were distri-

buted by the sovereign, with the population attached as serfs of the individual new owners in recognition of service. It was in this way that Sosnofka, which probably developed around Peter the Great's iron-oxide works, was given to and divided between the Benckendorffs and a branch of the Princes Galitzine. Hereafter the village was divided into two parishes which were known as the *Kendorskaya* (corruption of Benckendorffskaya) and the *Kniashaya* (the Princes). A curious relic of the eighteenth century was that apart from these two parishes, there was a third minute section, of only about twenty households, which was commonly alluded to as *Nadelnaia* (Appanage). Its members were either Popovs or Neverovs—a clear indication that they were the descendants of two households which, probably owing to a clerk's error, were omitted in the original grant distributing the village between the Benckendorffs and the Galitzines.

The Kendorskaya half held a new and an old church, both built entirely of timber. The old one dating from the second half of the eighteenth century was very small, painted in a mellow dark red, with green roofs and cupola, and contained some beautiful old icons set in tarnished gold frames of fine workmanship and design. Surrounded by its old cemetery and a grove of birches and willows, it stood tucked away blinking sleepily down by the river: considered structurally unsafe, it was only used a few times a year, notably on its patron-saints' day, or when the new church needed some repairs and cleaning. The new one, completed when I was a child, was all in brilliant pinks and greys, with a magnificent gilt cupola—a brash example of the Diocesan Architect's best efforts, and its interior in everything conformed to its exterior; it stood in haughty eminence on the Kendorskaya side of the vast market place, twelve to fifteen acres square, which occupied the centre of the village.

Right across the market-place on the Kniashaya side and



OLD CHURCH, SOSNOEKA

on the edge of the open fields one saw a large squat white brick building, crowned by a shallow green cupola, surmounted by a tall gilt cross, and with the Empire pediments supported by four dark red sandstone columns. There was no belfry and the church bells were hung from a timber frame adjoining the church. At first sight, in spite of the cross surmounting it, you got the impression of a mosque, and yet it actually was the parish church for the Princes' side. This curious monument originated as follows: soon after the 1812-15 campaign during which the then Benckendorff, after some notable successes at Leipzig, led the allied forces in the conquest and occupation of Holland while the corresponding Galitzine distinguished himself at Borodino and after, the two warriors decided to build jointly a church in Sosnofka to commemorate their victories.

The plans laid were ambitious both as to size and materials, and an enormous gilt cupola was to crown the main building, with a tall belfry to flank it. But, alas, with the building half finished the noble heroes quarrelled—I was never able to discover what about—and as a result the ambitious plan could not be carried out; the building was made fit for use as best as the limited funds allowed, and the strange structure was handed down to posterity as the parish church of the Princes' side.

The two big churches stood on the outskirts of their respective parishes, facing each other across the common which since the liberation of the serfs was part of the Benckendorff estate. On this the two main roads leading through Sosnofka crossed; to them, in my time, was added the terminus of a railway branch connecting Sosnofka with the main line from Moscow to the Volga. In one corner of the market place stood the only tea-house available to the population—a combination of inn, restaurant, and on market and fair days, exchange. This establishment was housed in a two-storied timber building,

with a yard and stables attached, and there nearly all business transactions were carried out and successful conclusions celebrated over vodka and tea. A noisy and exciting process this was, lasting well through the night, no closing hours being observed, at least through the big autumn and spring fairs. Around this centre the several rows of open sheds, furnished with counters and shelves, stretched away in all directions, forming two or three short streets of shops which were empty all the week round, except on market day—in Sosnofka on a Wednesday—when the circulating traders, drapers, clothiers bootmakers and cobblers, saddlers and many more would occupy them to ply their trade. Amongst them would also be a combination of book, stationery and gift shop where sometimes, at least when I was a child, a public writer had his desk, attending to the official and private correspondence of his customers. Behind the rows of shops an indescribable medley of vehicles with their teams of horses were parked, to disperse late in the evening with unsold goods and proceed straight to the next market town about ten miles away. I never could understand when or where the journeymen traders slept; they had no caravans and were always on time wherever they were due.

Further out stretched the line of rails and posts where horses and livestock were on sale. Here also were offered carts in summer and sledges in winter and a variety of agricultural implements and household goods, all of them the products of home industries. Still further, in one corner of the square, stood a number of what now would be termed “prefabricated” timber houses, the horizontal logs of their walls neatly fitted together, with rafters, doors and window-frames leaning against them. A house of this kind, consisting, it is true, only of one sizeable room with an entrance hall about half that size, could be acquired for the incredibly cheap price of two or three pounds, and the buyer would cart it away himself. There were, of course, many more things offered for sale, in fact every-

thing that was used in a peasant household was available, according to seasonal needs.

The attendance at the market days varied: there were slack periods, such as midsummer and winter, but activities gradually increased to reach their climax in autumn at the two day General Fair held on St. Sophie's Day in mid-September, and in spring at the three day Horse Fair on St. George's Day in April. Both were attended by literally thousands of people from all over the countryside, and in the case of the Horse Fair from far beyond, and yet there was a considerable difference between them. The General Fair was not more than an amplified market day, as far as wares were concerned, but permeated by a Harvest Festival atmosphere of well-being and general exuberance—with the clothes of the women, young and old, still flamboyant in their traditional costumes which varied considerably from canton to canton.

At the Spring Horse Fair the population had a means of giving vent to their profoundest sporting instinct. The southern part of Tambov province with the whole of Voronesh, were since the beginning of time the breeding ground of the best horseflesh in Russia, or so at least they fancied themselves, and acted accordingly. In a population where the term "horseless" is equivalent to "pauper," a purely economic foundation provided a fertile basis for a sporting superstructure, and, as the Russian peasant is more of a driver than a rider it was only natural that the trotting thoroughbred should become the object of his passionate adulation.

It is, I think, worth mentioning here that both the Russian trotting and the English riding thoroughbred are of similar origin. Soon after Charles II had received the gift of an Arab stallion and seven mares from an Eastern potentate, a Russian magnate, Prince Orloff, received a similar gift of a stallion and twenty mares from another. In both cases those gifts had the same consequences: the effect on horse-breeding was tre-

mendous, and not less so on the sporting imagination of the breeders. In my time an average householder would be prepared to recite the pedigree of his horses in detail to establish their relationship, however distant, to one of the champion trotters through the ages, whose names would be household words to him, just as they would be to all his neighbours and friends.

But let us go back to Sosnofka on the eve of St. George's Day. The vast expanse of the market place would already be filling up with carts, each with a string of horses attached, and nearly all the houses in the village would be full of its quota of guests, mostly customers preparing for the fray. After a few feeble skirmishes on the preceding afternoon, at dawn on St. George's Day the serious action started: a subdued roar of combined cries, horses whinnying and stamping, and snatches of song, would be heard even from a distance, and then suddenly you were in the midst of a seething mass of horses, carts, and men. Everybody would be shouting at the top of their voice, horses neighing and rearing, especially when a ring for inspection was formed around them: everywhere people could be seen clambering under and over the horses, inspecting their teeth and feeling their fetlocks. Suddenly a lane in the crowd would open, along which, not without danger to the bystanders, one or more carts would proceed at a full gallop; a method of testing cart-horses which was as popular as it was pointless. In and out of all this commotion the tribes of gipsies would slip, giving advice, buying and selling by proxy, and not infrequently chased and beaten up by their infuriated clients.

With the inevitable April showers as often as not the ground would be ankle-deep in mud, in which man and beast had perforce to wallow. Nobody paid the slightest attention, except perhaps the few housewives who had insisted on accompanying their husbands with the laudable but nearly always futile hope

of saving at least a part of the proceeds from being absorbed in the customary treating bout at the conclusion of a deal.

Shrouded in shawls those desolate figures could be seen cowering on their carts, sadly and disgustedly contemplating a male crowd revelling in untrammelled freedom; cheating, taking unfair advantage of your neighbour and last, but not least, unrestrained carousing being the immemorial privilege of anyone engaged in a horse deal all the world over.

In such chaotic manner for two days the local trading in horseflesh was conducted, but at the same time a restricted part of the square was reserved for transactions of a different and far superior kind. Here were assembled thoroughbred and half-bred trotters and carriage horses, whether singly or already assorted in pairs and troikas, artillery and train horses and heavy carthorses for town use. This business was conducted in a more orderly fashion. A number of the crowd wore smart horsey clothes, and quite a few cavalry men and gunners, officers and men, could be seen in uniform, representing remount commissions. Only in one respect were both sections alike, the gipsies were everywhere in both.

It was this section of the fair which accounted for its reputation all over the country. To indicate the scale of its transactions it suffices to say that in the spring of 1914 between 3,000 and 4,000 artillery and train horses were shipped from Sosnofka by German and Austrian remount officers alone; these gentlemen used to arrive quite openly, and conduct their affairs without making any secret as to the destination of their acquisitions—in fact it was one of them who gave me the information quoted here. What a comment on the atmosphere of complete insouciance on Russia's part. . . .

I never could keep away from the fairs, and often drove out on regular market days too for an hour or so, just to watch and get my fill of local gossip. Toward the end of the day, when business was over, the talk ranging wider and wider

often embraced such far-reaching topics as foreign affairs. For instance the fact that the Germans were buying came to me when I overheard the following conversation: "The Germans are lively about buying horses this year, aren't they?"—"Oh, I don't know, they've been doing it for years." An older man, ominously: "That's all very well, but with our neighbours kicking up a non-stop row, one is never safe." Then I chimed in, wanting to know where they got it all from, and the first speaker told me his uncle had just been talking to the German round the corner, so I immediately went there. All this sounds rather obscure—but what the older man had meant, in terms of international politics, was that the local wars in the Balkans, which had been going on since 1912, were a constant menace to Russia.

The bulk of gossip was not, of course, concerned with international politics: it dealt with purely peasant affairs. Whatever its scope—local, regional or even all Russian—would remain a closed book to anyone not intimately conversant with the basic facts of the peasant's material life.

On land which was its inalienable property the peasant household produced their food, clothing and shelter by their own labour, and from materials obtained, so to speak, within walking distance. Therefore the peasant was completely independent, as far as society at large was concerned, with the cost, at most, of merely tightening his belt.

Everything needed by a household was grown and produced at home—bar the essential salt and, in Lent, a certain quantity of salt or frozen fish, and tea and sugar—the last could all be dispensed with. Beer was still home-brewed and only the strictest fiscal control could prevent the distilling of *samagon*, the Russian equivalent of poteen. With livestock, and flax and hemp home-grown, the raw material for clothing was pro-

vided. Local or regional home industries attended to the simple assortment of implements, vehicles and tools for farming and pots and pans for the kitchen, with in this case only one, though I confess notable, exception, the proverbial Tula samovar. A young husband establishing his own home would, with the help of his neighbours, build a house with bricks made in the village kiln from local clay and timber felled and brought in by his own horses from the nearby forests.

Such weret he fundamentals on which the peasants' livelihood was based; they gave the possibility of a secure and self-contained life with seasonal periods of heavy and long hours of work, with intervals of comparative leisure and rest. But it was also a responsible and exacting life; each householder was the head of a complete economic unit served by a skilled and responsible staff. He had not only to possess, at his fingers' ends, all the necessary skills; he had to be resourceful and wise to solve the innumerable problems and conflicts that arose almost hourly in his complicated organisation. But even the best, the most resourceful and energetic amongst them would be unable to stand alone: it was only with the closest possible co-operation with their own community that security, in the long-run, could be, and was, achieved. This essential mutual co-operation permeated the peasant's whole life and, whilst protecting him against individual default from any form of duty or taxation that the state might impose, also gave him an unescapable obligation toward any work or duty that his own community might find necessary to demand of him. Such duties necessitated corporate or group action under the direction of men in all respects his equals, so that in the course of time a collective approach had become, in many ways, a second nature.

I feel that I must now hasten to reduce to lifesize the image of the "perfect peasant" which the preceding lines are likely to create in the reader's mind, for in normal times no one in the

world could equal the Russian peasant's negative attitude to his mode of life. The duties imposed by the community were found onerous, vexatious and often superfluous, and were shirked whenever and wherever possible, so that to every reasonable being they became a symbol of an obsolete and reactionary attitude of the powers that be. But there was no sullen and silent resistance—on the contrary, able, and as often as not brilliantly expressed, criticism would take up most of the time of any gathering. Everybody seemed to be straining against the intolerable burdens which collective duties imposed on the individual.

Administrators and scholars misinterpreted this attitude of the peasantry. What, in my humble opinion, they overlooked was that this critical atmosphere was but another example of corporate action, unconsciously perhaps, if perversely, designed to protect the system. For when the great crisis at last came, as if by magic all vestige of dissatisfaction was swept away, and every action, both in acceptance and in resistance, was determined by the collective body of the peasantry with its unshakable loyalty to the community and its ties.

It is for the historians of the future to decide why and how such an amazing situation in the life of a great nation arose—I must get back to the Sosnofka people milling about at the horse fair, to tell of a tiny episode during one of the last summers before the war. In an odd way it has always summarised for me my whole life and connection with Sosnofka and its people, whom in the end I was destined to leave for ever.

I had been spending the evening at our Central School with its headmaster—my old teacher Ramsin—and was returning home on horseback, a distance of about two and a half miles, along our interminable village main street. The time was round midnight—just before the first cock-crow, as they say in Russia. It was a very warm night indeed, about the middle of July, with the full moon shining at its brightest, dead calm and so full of

silence that one heard it in imagination. The low thatched houses were squatting in the dark without a light showing anywhere and casting their own shadows on the wide pavement of hard trodden earth that ran alongside. The broad bend of the street—40 yards wide, and grown with sparse short grass between two or three dusty and rutted carriage-ways—lay before me in full brilliant moonshine. As I was slowly making my way along the pavement a sudden awareness seized me: out of the silence arose the faint sound of human voices singing in the distance. Very gradually the sound rose, became clearer and finally took form: two tenors and two basses were singing a song called "The Evening Bells"—one of those melodious and rather sentimental pseudo folksongs, not remarkable in any way, but well set in four parts, with all sorts of telling effects, and therefore beloved by singers, and extremely popular all over the country for a generation. The voices were good, the one of the second bass exceptionally so, and the rendering of the song perfect in every way. I had stopped my horse in the shadow of the houses on one side of the street, and had taken all this in before I saw the singers.

When they appeared this is what I saw: two men, a tenor and a bass, were walking along close together down the middle of the road, at a slightly shambling leisurely gait—perhaps they were a little drunk. Then behind, at about two or three yards, and close to my side of the street, another tenor followed, and yet further along but skirting the other side of the street rose the beautiful second bass, the general background and mainstay of the whole proceedings. In this somewhat irregular formation they slowly advanced, out of step with each other and the music. As they drew level with me the first tenor reached and perched on a high long-drawn note, and threw up his head in doing so. And there it was—the slightly aquiline profile of a young bearded man, with his mouth wide open and singing to the stars, with an expression of unutterable bliss clearly lit up

for me by the moon, and never to be forgotten. They passed me without noticing my presence, still singing, and disappeared in the distance. I did not know anyone amongst them—perhaps they were not even Sosnofka people but just passing by . . . When I came to myself the scintillating silence was around me again and my horse, who had behaved throughout with patient fortitude and admirable restraint, walked me home and to bed—I am sure the happiest man in my world, bar perhaps those walkers going somewhere through the night, singing.

The management of Sosnofka, however interesting and satisfying in itself, soon had to take second place to much more important activities—my participation in local government. About a year after my return from the Japanese war I was duly elected a member of both the District and Provincial Assemblies of the Zemstvo and, a little later, District Marshal of Nobility.

Since 1785 only the nobility—in the English sense the term “landed gentry” is perhaps more appropriate—had an organised political existence and played a certain part in the administration of the country. This Estate had the privilege of appointing local judges and some of the chief officials elected from their numbers, and of exercising a general, though vague, control, over the Provincial Governors. But with no permanent executive bodies at their disposal the nobility took very little advantage of its rights and virtually did not do more than go through the motions of exercising them.

The emancipation of the serfs in 1860 produced a radical change in the administration of the whole country: in 1864 the introduction of provincial and district local government completed the epoch of “great reforms”, as it is known to Russians. The last of the “great reforms” created new assemblies, now to be composed of all classes, which were known as “Zemstvo”: their functions broadly corresponded to the County Councils of this country. In many ways their powers were much wider;

elementary education, public health, agronomic and veterinary services, and insurance were entirely in their charge and administered exclusively by boards elected from amongst its members.

Whereas the landowners elected to these new Assemblies representatives whose franchise was based on property, the peasantry elected theirs by communes, based on a system of suffrage of several degrees. This electoral system, governing the composition of the Zemstvo Assemblies was so constituted that two-thirds of its members came from propertied classes and only one-third from the peasantry.

Under the above system the nobility, who owned not more than 15 per cent of all arable in European Russia—the rest was exploited by the peasantry—acquired an influence in local government out of all proportion to its land holdings

What is more, the tri-annual assemblies of the nobility, continuing under the old system, elected as before Provincial and District marshals, but now these posts were provided with extended powers. The position of a Marshal could shortly be described as follows; whenever the co-operation of the local population was required, the Marshal was the ex-officio Chairman of any proceedings. To illustrate this it will perhaps suffice to say that I myself, as the District Marshal, had to be prepared to be Chairman of such committees as Quarter Sessions, District Zemstvo Assemblies, Conscription Commissions, Board of Public Trustees, Land Redistribution Committees, and quite a number of others, including Conservation of Internal River Communications, and certifying the insane!

All this provided yet another way in which the changes, brought about by the "great reforms," increased the administrative influence of the landed gentry.

The Zemstvo electorate was comparatively small, as there were never many landowners in Russia, and even fewer since the emancipation of the serfs, as a number found they could

not carry on under the new conditions and either sold their land to the peasant communities or, becoming permanent absentees, let it to them. On the other hand those who did stay were encouraged to do so by the chance of more political activity, while for the smaller landowner the paid posts on the Zemstvo elected administrative boards made country life possible.

As for the Marshals, serving several terms as such was an excellent foundation for a Home Office career and many Provincial Governors had started their careers in this way.

Politically speaking, the general trend was for the elected members of the Zemstvo and their executive boards to be fairly Conservative to Progressive, with the Marshals on the extreme right wing. But there did exist a minority amongst us, who, with the final intention of devoting our lives to political activity through the new Duma,¹ took up the cause of the radical opposition, often much more so even than the body of the Zemstvo's paid servants, who at that time formed the backbone of all reform movements.

As the Marshals were theoretically entirely independent from the Provincial Governors appointed by the Central Government, our attitude of opposition found expression in continuous friction on all sorts of small points which did not really affect our work but gave ample scope for political manoeuvring.

The man I came up against was Muratoff, Governor of the Province, and he was just as staunch a reactionary as I was a radical. Having started his career in the Judiciary he became at an early age a prominent Public Prosecutor and acquired a reputation for extreme harshness during the 1905 agrarian troubles. It was on the strength of this reputation that he had been appointed to Tambov, which was one of the hot-beds of

¹The Lower House of the Parliamentary Institution granted by Emperor Nicholas II in 1905.

such disturbances. We were bound, consequently, to clash on many points.

It was toward the end of my second term as Marshal that a series of incidents occurred which, it seems to me, throw a light on the murky scene of provincial politics of my day. Starting with the affair of the Sosnofka co-educational school, they culminated in a major conflict over my attitude at the time of the death of Count Tolstoy, the famous author and public figure of unequalled eminence.

As I mentioned before, the residents of Sosnofka had founded a progressive co-educational secondary school. As such schools usually were in towns, under the Ministry of Education, such a venture in a small country place, run privately with only a tiny subsidy from the Zemstvo, in itself was unique. Muratoff kept a suspicious eye on this establishment, and I knew that he would take every advantage of the slightest irregularity, mainly because he was perfectly aware that I had taken the whole thing under my wing, and had been able to clear away all the bureaucratic opposition encountered. Muratoff was quite right to be suspicious, because the life and soul of the enterprise was our local doctor, an out-and-out social revolutionary, whose forceful personality and enormous reputation amongst the local population rendered practically immune from direct interference. So there was Muratoff, die-hard of die-hards, confronted by a radical nobleman and a revolutionary employee!

The school had been running smoothly under a headmaster whom everybody liked, and who was as a teacher quite unexceptional, but at last Muratoff's opportunity came, or so he thought.

One evening, in Tambov on some Zemstvo business, I got wind that the Governor in person was proposing a sudden inspection at the Sosnofka school the very next morning; the reason given out for this visit was a report from the headmaster

alleging the manifest subversiveness of the school committee and widespread revolutionary influence of the school committee on the children.

I rushed straight home that night by sledge to be present at this inspection, which the Governor had wished to make in my absence, and so the next morning we all appeared at the school together. Nothing tangible was found, and whenever the Governor overstepped political discretion in harrying the school board I stepped in to question his right to do so. In the end I was able to reduce the charge to the futile fact that a portrait of the revolutionary Chernichevsky, dead for ages, was hung in one of the recreation rooms.

It all ended in a confidential talk between the two of us in a classroom, with me sitting on the master's platform and Muratoff pacing up and down, fuming with rage, declaring it was people like me who spelt the doom of the Empire, and I replying the same to him. The histrionic powers of that cultured, highly intelligent man and showman—his sister was a leading actress in Stanislavsky's Arts Theatre—gave me much the worst of this encounter, and I was glad that we were alone.

In the long run Muratoff won: making use of the special powers at the disposal of Governors after 1905, he forced the Medical Officer to resign from our Zemstvo and to leave the Province: he thereby lost his chance of becoming a member of the Duma which his local position had warranted. The whole incident was typical of the friction with which political life in those days abounded; incidents of this kind became well known, not only locally, but throughout Zemstvo circles all over the country, and were food for excellent propaganda for both sides.

The Tolstoy affair was much more serious, complicated and far reaching for me. The trouble started when Count Tolstoy made his famous flight to the small railway station of Astapovo. The whole of Russia was kept informed of this by means of the

railway telegraph and was in anxious awe watching the progress of his last illness. I cannot emphasise too strongly how deeply everyone was moved by this last action of Tolstoy's, and what a profound impression it had on all Russians. All this happened just before the opening of the autumn session of the District Zemstvo Assemblies. I, having business elsewhere had relinquished the chair to my Deputy, Khushev, a middle-aged and cultured gentleman of the old Liberal school—a great friend of mine—who had my entire confidence.

A few days before the session was due to open, the Marshal's office at Morshansk received an official letter marked "highly confidential and personal" and addressed to me by name. Khushev however opened it, and found that it contained a circular from the Governor to all the Marshals, to the effect that Tolstoy was sinking fast and that on no account was any manifestation whatsoever to be allowed at the Assemblies in the event of his death. Khushev, his radical blood aboil at such interference, informed the Governor by express that he did not intend to take the slightest notice of his instructions, and sent me post-haste a copy of this, quite rightly taking my solidarity for granted. I, however, somewhat alarmed, decided it would be more expedient if I took the chair myself. I therefore left my business and rushed back to Morshansk. A few days later on the morning when Tolstoy did die, Khushev at once proposed a minute's silence to honour the great departed, which I allowed, and the fat was in the fire with a vengeance.

Muratoff fired the first shot by bringing an official action against Khushev for violating official correspondence, and directed this charge to the highest court in the Empire, the Senate, for judicial decision: with the result that while the case was *sub judice*, Khushev was debarred from his functions. As far as I was concerned an exchange of extremely violent and venomous letters was all that took place for the moment, but later in the year my re-election for a third term as Marshal was

due, and the action Muratoff then took brought the whole incident even more into the public eye.

Under the existing law Marshals, on election, were formally approved by the Governors, and this sanction, in my case, Muratoff withheld without explanation. Such an action was without precedent: the approval was normally dependent only on the legality of the electoral procedure, and not on the political desirability of the candidate. Yet Muratoff took this drastic action and what is more without in any way consulting the central authorities.

The Assembly, that most conservative of bodies, rose in anger at once: Prince Chelokaev, an old and respected Provincial Marshal, gave the lead in an impassioned speech calling for resistance to such shameless violation of the nobility's sacred prerogatives, and a solemn protest was unanimously carried. This included a quite unprecedented stipulation that the Governor's action should be instantly challenged. Yet another resolution, politically even more important, called the other Provincial Assemblies then in session all over Russia to support Tambov's action.

This was the climax of my six years' political jousting with the powers that be, and it seemed to leave me vanquished and eliminated from active participation in local affairs for some time to come. In reality it had the opposite effect: I still continued to be an active member of both the District and Provincial Zemstvos, but now my standing was enhanced out of all proportion to the merits of my actions. As a result of Muratoff's action I not only became, more than ever, a leading figure in the Zemstvo opposition, whose support I always had, but now could, in part at least, rely on the support of the conservatives, as a champion of the privileges of their class.

One of the important consequences for me was that from then on I was invariably chosen to represent my province on important occasions, such as the All-Russian Council, a consultative body, periodically convened by the Government in St. Peters-

burg, the several Zemstvo Congresses held by its different provincial groups on questions of common interest, and many other occasions of the kind. All this brought me in close touch with the whole of the Zemstvo community—a fact that promised a more than satisfactory initial standing as a candidate for the next Duma.

I fear I have dwelt at some length on the vagaries of my political life, which in retrospect cannot fail to strike a detached observer as somewhat exaggerated, out of proportion and even slightly futile, especially in the light of future events. The fact remains that in a vast country, where the majority of the population has constituted itself into an uneasy pressure group, the politically active minority constantly resorts to symbolic skirmishing, trying to establish firmly their relative positions pending a continuously anticipated final showdown. So profoundly is this minority engaged in that pastime, that when the showdown comes at last, they are left with hardly any constructive proposals at all for the solution of the pressure group's demands, and are easily swept away to give place to a group which has that solution and fanatically believes in it.

Freed of a District Marshal's duties I was able to devote much more time to agreeable and interesting, if less important, pastimes: Sosnofka again claimed the largest part of it. All through the summer and the early autumn quite a number of our friends, both Russian and foreign, came to stay, whilst the routine of my mother's constructive demolition went on unabated, aided by the same band of faithful followers. In a way the foreign visitors were much more frequent than our Russian friends: the latter one had opportunity enough to meet in town during the winter seasons—in summer every one of them retired to their own estates, and the great distances prevented much visiting, except for autumn coursing for those few who still kept greyhounds.

Most of our visitors were close friends from England, and it was quite noticeable how most of them were impressed by the different species of Benckendorffs they observed in Russia: it wasn't a question of habits or material comforts so much, they were the same, except for small details, as in any English country house: it was rather the difference of background and the influx of totally alien interests that bewildered them. I don't know how far our visitors were conscious of this, and perhaps I am quite wrong in my interpretation, but the fact remains that they walked about as if bedazed, a state which nevertheless seemed to add to the pleasurable excitement of their visit. This bewilderment showed itself more than anywhere else in the pursuit of game, always of paramount interest in Sosnofka.

Practically all of this sport was what is known in England as "rough shooting". The exception in Sosnofka were a few pheasants, reared with great difficulty around one of the outlying copses, and which, though kept indoors all winter, could sometimes be made to fly a few yards in late September. This particular craze was the whim of my brother Pierre, who, excellent sportsman that he was had never seen, let alone shot, a really high driven pheasant. He had been infected by the pheasant idea when taking part, with our cousins, the Hatzfeldts, in one of the monumental shoots in Silesia, and was, for some reason, very impressed by them, though from a really sporting point of view the few pheasants encountered there were poor fun. Pierre even went to the lengths of sending the 18-year-old son of Michael Avdeich, the head coachman, for a year to Trachenberg, the Hatzfeldts' place in Silesia, to be trained as a pheasant keeper. Incidentally this boy returned with such a swollen head that all the rest of the hunting and farming staff did everything (and succeeded) to prevent the pheasant scheme from working properly—they had my silent sympathy. About 100 of these wretched birds were the yearly bag, apart

from quite a few whose legs were cut off in the fields by the mowing.

I too paid several visits to Trachenberg and had quite a few days shooting with the Hatzfeldts and their neighbours. Their shoots were indeed tremendous affairs, with bags of over a thousand hares, fifty brace of partridges, and a couple of hundred pheasants thrown in.

About twelve guns were lined up two hundred yards apart in an open field—with no hedges and only a few small copses visible in the distance; the space between was occupied by a number of beaters, one of whom carried on his back an enormous wicker basket, and from the two ends of the line of guns a vertical flank of beaters stretched to the horizon. Soon the first sound of the hunting horn floated through the air, and a perfectly played signal was taken up by three or four keepers all along the line. Even now I am moved by the pure physical delight of this unsynchronised flow of sound, so calm and collected, and yet so exciting in anticipation. On the last note the whole line started forward, and for quite a time nothing happened, till suddenly, in the distance, literally hundreds of hares were seen scurrying up and down, some in a leisurely fashion and some already going full out. Then gradually, at extreme range, the guns opened up, and very, very good shots they were—it was quite incredible at what distances they bowled the hares over.

Most of them, of course, were practically professionals—local landowners who did nothing but shoot from September until well into the New Year; and how they were armed for the fray—three six-shooter Brownings and two loaders each were quite usual, and I with my two Hollands, lagged far behind in firing power. According to my cousins these locals were mostly “Oxengraffen”—Oxen Counts—thus legend, somewhat maliciously, described the titles bestowed on army meat

contractors by Frederick the Great, of glorious and unforgettable memory.

The line was never allowed to stop even for a second, and the game was picked up on the march and then thrown into the wicker baskets, and when a copse was reached the guns went straight through it and shot the pheasants trying to flop to safety. The partridges were good sport—already in packs and sweeping about all over the place at a considerable height, but at them, curiously enough, those hare shots were not too good.

Right up to lunchtime the line moved on across the flat German countryside, covering four to five miles, and then another signal from the horn stopped us, and by some rather complicated manoeuvring we formed in a wide circle around a flag, in the owner's colours, raised on a flagpole in the centre. At yet another signal we moved towards it from all sides, continuing the massacre of the hares, who now had no chance of escaping forward and had to try to break out of the circle. About two hundred yards from the flag the guns stopped and the beaters continued alone, and the rest of the game was finished off with the guns shooting only behind. After lunch another exactly similar drive over fresh ground finished the day's sport.

Then started what was, for me, always a rather painful ceremony. The bag was laid out in interminable lines to form a square; on three sides of it stood the beaters, well over a hundred of them. On the fourth side in military formation the thirty-odd keepers, in their uniforms, a dozen amongst them with hunting horns; next to them the guns in a group, interspersed with the ladies who had come out for lunch.

The head keeper went up to the host and asked leave to report the results of the shoot. This permission obtained, the horns started sounding consecutively the "death" of the various game, in the order of their "nobility", as the Germans have it: foxes, blackgame, woodcock, partridge, pheasant, even wild duck came before the chief victim—the miserable hare at the

tail end of the list. At the last notes of the fanfares the head keeper read out in a loud voice the total bag, again in the same order, followed by the score of each individual, sometimes even including the number of cartridges used. Alas, except for one occasion, my name invariably brought this roll call to a close. Just to give an idea of these days, here are some figures of a normal shoot I remember: the head gun got 320 hares, 6 partridges, and 25 pheasants—my contribution was 60 hares, 40 partridges and 25 pheasants. Then the horns sounded the “retreat,” and the pageant of the *strecke*—what illusory feeling connects this term for me with “stricken field”?—was over. Everybody went home to a rather elaborate dinner and dance far into the night, which assembled all the guns and their ladies. From the moment one left the field the conversation was exclusively about the personal bag of the participants: this all permeating theme bored the ladies so much, that I who had not much to say on the subject was granted special access to their time and sympathies.

My poor brother fell completely under the spell of these performances—I still can’t understand why; he was just as keen on rough shooting as I was. Not that we had no *battues* at Sosnofka; as I said earlier, these took place every Sunday from September onwards, but with only one miserable horn sounded by Vassilly to announce, with inarticulate squeaks, a woodcock or blackgame, a long time after it was already dead. On one occasion while Pierre was trying to reproduce the beautiful tunes of the Germans, he let slip past a fox, the most precious and coveted game for us, as it was for the Hatzfeldts.

But at Sosnofka we had shoots that were, bar the pomposity, just as organised as those at Trachenberg. With no big game such as elk and bear in our vicinity, the high-water mark of our sport was wolves, which though still fairly common, were rapidly becoming scarce. At the best we would get four or

five, but sometimes a whole season would pass without a wolf being heard of anywhere within reach.

The wolves did a great deal of damage, and the surrounding villages would soon feel the presence of the growing wolverines requiring a great deal of food, provided nightly by forays of the parent wolves.

There were two ways of shooting wolves: in autumn, if a lair was reported in the neighbourhood, and in winter after snowfall—the last being by far the most sporting way of getting the “grey,” as wolves were known by sportsmen and peasants alike.

Wolves are cautious and to protect their lair will not kill nearer than two to three miles away—I have seen myself on the pelts of old wolves large bald patches worn by the sheep’s carcasses carried from far afield. Therefore the first step was to discover the exact location of the lair, which would be established inside alder thickets on the bogs along the rivers. To such places the keepers went at nightfall and gave the wolf call, waiting for the litter to show itself. If one was near, noises would become audible, not unlike that of several months old puppies, and sometimes, those sounds would approach and if the moon was up vague shadows could just be perceived flitting about in the dense part of the undergrowth. This marked the end of the reconnaissance, and one would hurry away to avoid being discovered by an old wolf returning unexpectedly early from a successful foray.

It was most important not to be sensed by the parent wolf—it would be sufficient for them to hear the call from a distance—if this should happen the whole litter would be led away to some other thicket and the search begun all over again.

Very few people could give the appropriate wolf call well enough: we were lucky at Sosnofka to have, at a neighbouring village, a peasant family—two brothers and their grown-up sons—who, as a sideline, were wolf trackers. They were sub-

stantial people as peasants go, and tracking, to them, was a passion in which they were always prepared to indulge, irrespective of any remuneration. Also they were indifferent to the manner in which the quarry would come to its end, be it by gun, greyhound or even netting—this last was still occasionally employed by the peasantry—as long as they had the wolves tracked, and were sure to take part in the jollifications which always followed the kill. Their calls were masterly and the elder brother was reputed to have on occasion misled an old wolf on his way back home to the litter and even obtained an answer from him.

The litter once properly located, the actual autumn shoot was not a very interesting affair; with a great number of beaters, and as usual on a Sunday, a large drive was organised which would take in the whole thicket and a considerable part of the countryside around. The guns disposed in the most likely places—the choice being entirely left to the lively imagination of our keepers—with a great hullabaloo the whole unwieldy machine would go into action. Eventually the old pair of wolves would get away with some of the young, while at the most two or three of the stupider puppies would fall an easy prey to the guns. My great friend Evan Charteris, a very meticulous sportsman, when on his first wolf shoot, nearly let a young wolf pass, not quite certain if it would be proper to shoot an animal that looked and behaved like a half-grown Alsatian.

These autumn shoots had to be organised to satisfy the local population; we ourselves didn't care for them much as they diminished the already low stock of wolves.

On the other hand shoots after snowfall gave the best sport available to us. By the first half of November winter set in for good, and the whole countryside was covered with a thick layer of snow, and movement possible only in sledges or on snowshoes—a sort of short ski, with the gliding surface covered

with reindeer pelt to prevent slipping back. At that time, and in their mating season at the end of January, wolves roamed about the countryside in packs of six to eight, consisting of a wolf with her litter and a number of yearling wolves. Hunting all through the night at dawn they settled down for the day in any convenient thicket or copse. The problem was to find this lair in the short winter's day, and to hold the wolves there until the guns were notified and brought up.

Just before dawn three or four trackers would set out in sledges and search the countryside for a fresh spoor crossing the road. When this was found they followed it till it approached a likely place, which then was circled in ever narrowing sweeps, finally encircling the whole copse with a beflagged cord lying on the bushes and undergrowth about three feet from the ground. By this time it would be midday, so the guns seldom reached the chosen spot before the early afternoon.

One of the best efforts of our trackers came to its conclusion so late in the afternoon that we had abandoned all hope for the day and, some of the guns having even gone home, only three of us remained waiting. It was freezing hard on this late December day, and the sun was going down in all its glory, with the indigo shadows of the night already beginning to invade the bluish sparkle of the snow plain, when our leading sledge drew up some distance away from a score of ancient oaks rising black and stark, without a stick of undergrowth, from a small ravine descending the rolling slope of bare fields.

It seemed impossible to us that anything could hide there as we closed in on foot and lined up across the ravine. But the moment the elder Mikhalov approached on his snowshoes to the edge of the copse above us and clapped his hands, five wolves appeared as if from nowhere and rushed toward us along the bottom of the ravine. Two broke through the flanking flags, but three others came on full out, in their unmistakable loping gallop, one making straight for the gap be-

tween me and my neighbour. I lifted my gun and—oh horror—one of the barrels went off . . . So sharp was the frost that my trigger finger had frozen numb during the short wait, and produced this premature explosion. Luckily I got the wolf with my second barrel sixty paces away, and a very satisfying shot that was, the more so as the other guns got one each too. Those grey shapes bolting out into the open and the suddenness with which the dead and silent landscape became a scene of intensive movement and excitement, only to become dead and silent again a few moments later, with the sun just disappearing over the snowy horizon, is an experience I shall never forget.

But generally the depths of winter, with my duties as Marshal curtailed, found Sosnofka slumbering quietly, with only occasional visits from me, as I was spending quite a lot of time either in St. Petersburg or abroad, mostly in London. One of the most amusing periods was when I shared a flat with Maurice Baring: he was then the *Morning Post* special correspondent in St. Petersburg, and took the most profound interest in all the stirring political life of the moment.

We had a flat on the ground floor of the house occupied by Count Solski and his wife, an elderly and pompous couple; he was a high-ranking member of the Council of Empire, and had been created a Count on the strength of his eminent services. It was a way that the last Emperor had of granting titles to childless couples only—thus avoiding a possible increase in the hereditary aristocracy, a considerable proportion of which did not always see eye to eye with their sovereign.

This flat was the only one let in the house and had its entrance from the courtyard, discreetly reached through a *portecochère*, and was, in fact a perfect *garconnière*. Here every night, Maurice and I had our fight over the day's telegram to his paper, the substance of which we had collected during the day from all the possible and impossible sources at our disposal. The day's

work thus being taken care of, the rest of the evening was spent in bringing together all sorts of people for late supper, which never ended until well past midnight, and I am afraid gave frequent cause to Count Solski's butler to descend upon us with a very long face indeed.

In day-time too the flat was rather a lively place; even at breakfast it was not without excitement, owing to Maurice's passion for coffee machines. There were about ten of these contraptions lined up on our sideboard, and at least three of them were brought into action every morning to test the coffee they produced. Under Maurice's ministrations not one of them ever worked properly for two days running, and some were downright dangerous to life and limb. There was one in particular, supposed to emit a piercing whistle when the coffee was ready, which blew up on us one morning, and I had all the trouble in the world to persuade Maurice not to try it again, as he still maintained it was one of the best.

My brother Pierre had brought back from a bear hunt two suckling bear cubs, and insisted on passing one of them on to me—his rooms at the Horse Guards, he said, were not quite large enough for the two. I did all I could to prevent the bear's installation, but of course, Maurice received it from the cab in which it arrived literally with open arms. However, it proved to be a charming animal, but for the drawback that it was not "house-trained" at all, with a bear's peculiar habit of giving vent to all his feelings, in emotional crises, in one way only, and very profusely at that. The way he fed was to get up on his hind-legs, grasp a milk bottle in the forepaws, and drink the whole greedily at one gulp; this upright position came naturally to him, and he used it freely except when in flight.

To take notice of the bear had been beneath the dignity of our cat—a nondescript animal, belonging really to the kitchen, which was ruled by Trofim and his wife, M. La Roche's aides from Sosnofka. One day I was alone in the dining-room read-

ing the paper, and the cat was sitting in a chair facing the door, which opened on to a long corridor leading to the kitchen. Through this door the bear, apparently in very good spirits, made his entrance on all fours; and as he was passing the cat's chair on his way to me, the cat with lightning speed, and all claws out, swiped his forehead. The little bear stopped in his course, turned round, rose to full height on his hind legs, and slowly started towards the cat, still continuing in majestic indifference on the chair. When near enough a little short and broad forepaw was slowly raised and with one terrific blow the cat was swept off the chair to streak for dear life along the corridor to the refuge of the kitchen. The bear turned toward me, and blinking his small brilliant eyes, expressed his satisfaction and pleasure by sundry delighted little grunts and squeaks.

The mainly agrarian character of the troubles which accompanied the end of the Japanese war showed clearly that the peasantry was not only deeply conscious of the dead end into which the traditional form of land tenure was leading the country but was determined to find a way out of it at all costs. This feeling was shared to the full not only by the Government and all its administrative apparatus, but, and if possible even more so, by the landowners of whatever political inclinations and sympathies. It is, in fact difficult to find adequate words to describe the background of concerted worry and preoccupation which the whole complex situation caused to all even remotely concerned with public life.

Between 1905-14 the political changes in Russia went at a fast and furious tempo: a constitution was granted, and twice radically altered both with regard to the powers and privileges of the representative institution, the Duma, and the electoral

laws governing its membership; and still the peasantry, in spite of the fact that its material prosperity for at least a quarter of a century had been growing at a surprising rate, continued to be concerned only with the question of their fundamental security. This to them meant one thing, and one thing only: the unalienable right to cultivate a piece of land owned and equally shared by all the members of a community.

The traditional and basic characteristic of a peasant land-tenure can be given in a very few words. It was a form of ownership based on the assumption that the primary owner of the land was none other than the rural community as a whole. Every household had a right to a definite share in each of the three-fields into which the agricultural area of the village was divided: this share depended on the size of the household it was intended to support. Hence periodical redistribution of the arable became a necessity, and took place whenever the village assembly decided, by a two-thirds majority, to do so.

There were many and obvious reasons why such a system of tenure could not exploit the land to the full—it would lead me too far to try and review them here—the peasants themselves were perfectly aware of them, if only by comparing the returns with those from privately owned land. But common ownership had one overriding advantage—it provided a household with fundamental security and independence not only in the present, but for all time, so to speak. This was the reason why, as long as the reserves of land fit for agricultural exploitation were adequate, the peasantry was well content with land tenure in common. So much was this so, that when the liberated serfs were offered the opportunity to leave the commune and receive their share of land in permanent individual ownership, only a quite insignificant few took advantage of this possibility.

But as time went on individual shares at each redistribution became smaller and smaller and, with a population rising fast,

the ominous threat of insecurity began to make itself felt. It was at first a fairly gradual process: the constant flow of privately owned land which the peasant communities were able to acquire with state help was the cause of this, but towards the turn of the century the spectre of land hunger began to loom on the horizon, casting its pall all over the countryside. There was an obvious, if temporary, solution to hand—the acquisition of the land still remaining in the hands of large and medium owners, though it is true there was not much left: only just over a tenth of the total arable surface of European Russia.

Nevertheless the peasantry, having decided to get hold of this last reserve of arable and to make an attempt to oblige the landowners to abandon it, took matters into their own hands, with agrarian riots all over the country as the outcome. We at Sosnofka did not have to suffer from any breaches of peace at all, and the relations between the estate and the village were not disturbed and continued to be good all through that troubled period. My father, however, in company with a majority of progressive landowners, decided to satisfy the peasantry's admitted claim to the land, and in consequence all arable outside the three home farms and permanently let to the peasants was, at that time, sold to the village community. This operation was rendered quite easy by the existence, since the liberation of serfs, of two State Land Banks, one of which paid the landowners in negotiable bonds, while the other advanced peasants the necessary funds on the basis of a long term and very cheap loan at $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent interest, which included a sinking fund.

On the peasant's side, all the negotiations and formalities of the purchase were in the hands of the village *Selskoie Oupravlenie*—Village Executive—a very simple institution consisting of the Village Elder, his deputy, treasurer and one or two members—elected for two to three years by the Assembly. All the householders had a vote in this Assembly, and it is curious to note that women were full members if they were

widows with children under age, or if the husband was away, either serving his country or a sentence in jail. A writer, i.e., a clerk, a paid servant, was a necessary adjunct to this institution and, I may say, very often became its ruling spirit.

With such transfers of land occurring all over Russia, the object of the rioting was at least partially achieved and soon normal conditions were restored.

But it was an uneasy peace, the more so as now a new and very disturbing problem arose, which made the peasantry acutely aware of the importance of common land tenure as a protection against an unavoidable proletarianisation of the majority of them in the not too distant future. The peasant was organically tied to the fact that he was able to get his food, his clothing and his shelter from within walking distance, and entirely by his own efforts combined with those of his own community: this gave independence and security. For him a "horseless" peasant was bad enough, but a "landless" one unthinkable. The idea of abandoning his land, and becoming a permanent factory worker, to be a paid servant, entirely dependent on the will of his master, was completely alien to him. There were of course factory workers, many of them continuously employed, but nevertheless they all owned homesteads, with enough land to give them sustenance, to which they could return at any time they chose.

The new worry was the direct result of a fresh approach to the solution of the land problem, which expressed itself in a law leading to a fundamental change in the conditions under which peasants held their land.

By this law every householder had henceforward the right at any moment to demand that his holding should become his own individual and permanent property and not subject any more to periodic redistribution.

It is important to bear in mind that this measure was the first major action promulgated by the Government on the initiative

of the new representative institutions, who, themselves had the full support not only of the Zemstvo, but even of its overwhelmingly social revolutionary servants. The aim of this reform, passed in 1910, was nothing less than to convert the countryside into a land of economically and politically stable smallholders who would be able to do away with the common field system and thereby immensely increase the productivity of the land as a whole.

The "Land Reform" as this law became known, took, of course, a considerable time to make its way through the legislature. During that period the provincial Zemstvos were constantly consulted both by the Government and by the Duma. I participated in all this activity with the keenest possible interest: so much so that towards the end, when as a non-approved Marshal I had full leisure to concentrate on it, I became, in a way, a leading figure amongst the group of south-east provincial Zemstvos concerned with the various problems arising out of this tremendous reform. This brought me into contact with people in all walks of life, and thus I was able to keep close watch on the constantly shifting trends of opinion which characterised the period of preparation of the Reform, and afterwards of the working of all its elaborate services.

From the very beginning I was struck by several features which seemed to me disturbing amidst the general acclamation with which the government's intentions to embark on a land reform were greeted. There was, for instance, the fact that the bulk of the intelligentsia, as represented by the executive personnel of the Zemstvo, which, especially on the highest levels, was of genuine socialist persuasion, had shifted their ground: they were now quite prepared to abandon the Russian peasant community, which had been held by them as a direct precursor of the future socialist commune and therefore to be preserved at all costs as the cornerstone of a socialist society. Their new attitude seemed to me to leave them without any constructive

plans at all for the future, and to have diminished their influence over the peasantry, so firmly established during the agrarian troubles.

The peasantry, right up to and through what now can be called the abortive pre-revolution of 1905, had in all political matters tacitly but firmly accepted the guidance of the Social Revolutionaries, a term cumulatively applied to the socialist movement or anyone connected or sympathising with it. It was of Bakunin-Kropotkin, that is purely agrarian lineage, and left the Marxists, under Lenin and Trotsky and still abroad, with no influence whatsoever over the countryside of their native land.

I here come to the other aspect of the situation as a whole by which my political conscience was sorely troubled.

I think it must be clear to the general reader that I always had closely identified myself with the ultimate aspirations of the peasantry in the solution of the land problem. I had always been inclined to think that the peasantry as a whole was prepared to accept the new, individual and permanent form of land tenure at which the Land Reform aimed. But there were features in the law as it stood which could not but concentrate the peasantry's attention on the problem of final security. As I said before this law gave the right to every household to claim its share from the community at any time; yet in every village a section of the householders would have more land than would be due to them at the next redistribution, and this section would always, owing to the steadily rising population be in a minority. It was therefore against the interest of the majority for anyone to claim his share at once, because at the next redistribution their increased families might entitle them to more land. It took some time for this factor to crystallise itself in the minds of the peasantry as a whole, but in the end it began to modify their initial unrestricted acceptance of the Land Reform as it stood.



SOSNOFKA, THE TIMBER HOUSE AND THE WHITE HOUSE

At first the fundamental issue was obscured by the grave practical difficulties encountered in the application of the law; these were in the main connected with the reshuffle of all the holdings of the rest of the community, when a few or even only one household claimed a share united in one place outside the three fields. It would be tedious to enter into more detail here of the other not less troublesome factors which applied to the resettlement of the claimants themselves. The result was that instead of the joyful rush, unanimously anticipated by all sides, to take advantage of the new conditions, the elaborate organisations built up for the working of the reform had only a slow trickle of cases to deal with, unevenly dotted over the immense surface of the land.

It was, of course, the substantial householders who dared to affront the inescapable difficulties of the new order of things; these were men well equipped with livestock and implements and whose share in the land would represent from twenty to fifty acres of arable—a holding in short, which on the face of it, should enable them to stand up to life on their own. Yet comparatively few of them made an immediate success: there was, to begin with, on the material side, the loss of their share in pastures, meadows, woods and other rights shared in common which, although supposed to be adequately compensated for in arable, still made the transition more difficult and cumbersome. Then there was—and this perhaps more important in the long run—the feeling of isolation produced by the impossibility of taking advantage in the mutual help which age-old custom and usage provided for the members of a closely-knit community. And again, what about the feeling of frustration at the loss of influence in the councils of the community and being markedly, if silently, treated as having “gone over” to the other side?

The mass of the peasantry watched those tribulations of their leading members with intense interest, and soon a feeling of

anxious misgiving made itself felt. It was not as if their economic or material interests were at all affected; the number of "new dealers"—to borrow *mutatus mutandis* from the future—was much too small for that. Life was going on just as before with nothing whatever changed or even threatening to be so.

For generations, ever since the Liberation, when the community as a body had to step into the administrative shoes of the landlord, this was felt as an irksome impediment by the individual forced to belong to it. With rising prosperity and many sources of material well-being gradually becoming available outside the cultivation of a share of the common field, a nearly universal dissatisfaction with the unbreakable bonds that tied the peasant householders to their community made itself felt through the land.

The Land Reform gave a solution, and that in a sense was the best advertisement for its favourable acceptance, and yet, in its very first manifestations in practice it seemed to demonstrate clearly only one thing: the positive qualities of the village community and the collective security it gave to those who were tied to it. The value of those positive qualities had been submerged for ages in the public consciousness—now a new burden of doubts perplexed the minds of the peasantry, already sorely tried by the problem of land scarcity.

So it came about that the peasantry as a whole found itself in the unenviable position of not being able to make up its mind: a situation more than ever disturbing as the conviction soon grew, and hardened fast, that the governing classes in general and what is more, the revolutionary opposition, in particular, had both, in spite of a display of feverish activity, left them high and dry, not knowing themselves in what direction salvation lay.

And they were right. For after all there we were; the whole structure of society undergoing the most fundamental political changes, in an atmosphere of strenuous—at times even fren-

zied—activity, always under the shadow of the brooding silence of our chief partner, the peasantry, ever watchful of our efforts and more and more disillusioned with our aims.

Then the war with Germany broke out . . .

CHAPTER V

THE 1914 WAR,

I wonder if in the preceding pages, in which, in an admittedly rather vague and disjointed way, I describe the first part of my adult life, I have succeeded in giving a correct impression of that strange mood of constant, if suppressed, unease that I shared with what I believe was the great majority of my countrymen in that summer of 1914? It was as if everyone dimly felt that soon the unavoidable choice would have to be made as a parting of the ways was reached, when the traditional way of life would have to be sacrificed in one way or another. And that notwithstanding an unprecedented and ever increasing material progress, experienced in every direction and above all affecting most favourably the peasantry.

The ominous grumblings from outside our frontiers—those in various degrees had been going on for years—had not much to do with this mood, nor had the continuous preparations, obvious to all, for an eventual armed showdown. After so many years of general peace—the Japanese affair, in the eyes of the great mass, was not more than an episode—the consequences of a prolonged struggle, involving the moral and material resources of the whole country, were not realised at all, the more so as expert opinion seemed to agree that a general conflict could only take the form of a blitzkrieg.

The London season was beginning to pall by Whitsuntide 1914 and Maurice and I, one bright morning, decided to slip over to Sosnofka for a while, and forthwith took the Nord

Express to bathe in the river Chelnovaya forty-eight hours later. But there it was the slack time too, and so, after a fortnight on the float in the river, we found ourselves in London again by the end of June. Things at the Embassy seemed to be about the same as they had been every summer for the last five years, with the Balkans fighting each other incessantly, and the Council of Ambassadors as usual trying to edge out of a general war, due to start every August after the harvest.

My father had by that time been Ambassador at the Court of St. James for fourteen years. During the first years, what with the close association of England with Japan, and the ensuing continuous friction culminating in the Dogger Bank incident, he had had by no means an easy time, and yet it soon became apparent that he had achieved for himself an exceptional position in the diplomatic world. The reasons for this were many, but most of them had to do with conditions which in the present day have no value whatsoever.

There was, for instance, my father's close acquaintance with King Edward and his Queen, sister of the Dowager Empress Marie of Russia, both daughters of Christian, King of Denmark. There was also the fact that sometime in the early nineteenth century an Earl of Pembroke had married the daughter of the then Russian Ambassador, Prince Simon Voronozov: these Voronozovs were in various degrees connected with the Shuvalovs, and all the Herberts took up this relationship, however distant and vague it had become. Prince Lichnovsky, the German Ambassador, was a first cousin of my father's, while the Austrian Ambassador, Count Mensdorff, claimed to be related by marriage through a minor Archduchess of Hapsburg—née Cröy. Mr. Isvolsky, who had been my father's Chancellor in London, was now Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs.

All I have said so far should make it clear that my father had advantages exceptional even for those days, which greatly

helped him to establish his status; but in his case, I think, they were enhanced by the personality of the man who had the opportunities of making use of them. Master of the technique of his calling, he was a man completely devoid of personal ambition, profoundly imbued with a sense of duty and service, and not to his own country alone, but to humanity as a whole. The more conscious was he of the obligations which the advantages I have been speaking of had given him, the more they made him independent both in his judgments and his actions.

The season, past its height, was drawing to a close, and I was participating, in a rather desultory fashion, pending my standard departure for work at Sosnofka. And then it happened. On a Wednesday, in the first week of July—courier day, when my father as usual was “incommunicado” in his study for the whole day, writing the weekly personal letter to his Foreign Minister—he suddenly sent for me. There he was, pacing silently up and down the large room for three or four minutes till in front of the window he stopped and said over his shoulder. “Cony, you had better pack up and go back. I think that this time we are in for it.” Then turning round and catching my eyes anxiously: “And I really don’t know what the English will do.” So that was that.

Before following my father’s advice I allowed myself a few days to wind up the loose threads of sentimental connections. It so happened that at a dinner party before a dance I was persuaded by a group of friends to give a farewell party. During this exceptionally hot season river parties were in great vogue and by telephoning then and there I had, by midnight the same night, a small launch waiting at Westminster Pier, complete with supper and a small dance-band. About eighteen of us went on board for a cruise down the river. This party of friends which set off in the highest spirits ended in a terrible tragedy. One of my guests, Denis Anson, probably not realising the strength of the tidal currents, lost his life taking a

dip in all his clothes and with him a member of the band, who was drowned going to his rescue. I went in too, to try and save the bandsman, assuming Anson, whom I knew to be a strong swimmer, to be safe and making for the shore. But the tremendous tide had carried them far out of reach.

I ascribe the cause of this disaster to the fact that we were all in the habit of taking these nocturnal swims in the upper reaches of the Thames, and did not realise the dangers of the tides.

By the middle of July I was back home—this time in St. Petersburg. What with my long London visit during that spring I found myself rather out of touch with my own capital, a situation which under the circumstances I was only too eager to remedy. I found everybody in a state of suppressed, but at the same time eager, expectancy, a sensation not devoid of agreeable excitement, and this mood, as a brief reconnaissance in Zemstvo circles confirmed, was fully shared by the countryside at large. How different from the intense smouldering antagonism which had been about to harden between ruler and ruled, I need hardly say. The protagonists seemed to be immensely relieved at being able to lay aside their own problems, and only too eager to stand up united in the most legitimate of all causes: to give help to their Western brethren and get at the Germans, whose attitude of jealous superiority from all time had become intolerable.

Such was the mood of the country which a few days after my return received the first mobilisation order; partial for the Army, but including the whole Navy. Although my position as Marshal (even non approved) gave me the option of exemption, my choice was quickly made, and I got into my lieutenant's uniform and reported for service—oddly enough to the same room at the barracks of the 8th Naval Division at Petersburg where I had done so, for the first time, fifteen years before as a volunteer.

After a few days of rather aimless waiting about in the so-called wardroom of that establishment, I was got hold of by the prospective Commander of the new *Poltava* and posted as a watchkeeper to this battleship. It was moored in the Neva alongside the Admiralty dockyard. Another few days and we all, officers and crew of the new battleship, now about to be commissioned, moved in one fine morning to get her ready for sea and action.

Meanwhile the war was getting under way in that rather cumbersome fashion of those pre-Air Force days, and with my ship still in the river, I had all the opportunities I could wish to keep in touch with the general trend of events. In a way I had a difficult time—whoever I met seemed to assume that I was fully cognisant of the intentions of the British Government and moreover, as their tone implied, that I was responsible in some degree at least for the mysterious inability of the British to make up their minds as to where they stood, the attitude of England being the chief and serious preoccupation of everyone.

Petersburg was full of rather flamboyant rumours about German preparedness and Austrian lack of such, and of the Italians staying out, which was not rated important either one way or the other. Also with the scarcity of any real war news, except for resounding declarations by all parties of their firm intention to get the best of the other, very colourful stories about last minute escapes from Germany were thoroughly enjoyed by all. They were, compared with what came later, rather mild affairs, such as the one about a rowdy demonstration of a crowd in front of the special train about to take the Dowager Empress Marie of Russia from Berlin to Copenhagen, during which the wig, some said of the Empress herself, and some, less daring, of one of the ladies in waiting, was forcibly removed. Such an offence, however, did not prevent the Empress from reaching her destination in safety and on schedule

as prescribed by the order of Wilhelm II—how far in spirit, if not in time, this sounds now.

Another story I remember was one very dramatically told by my cousin, Mary Troubetskoi, who was returning with her children and staff in what proved to be the last Nord Express to leave Paris for Petersburg. This train stopped, on an afternoon of an extremely hot day, in the midst of the bare expanse of the East Prussian plain, a few miles from Virballen, the frontier station. Everybody had to get out and continue on foot, and so a marching column of 200 men, women and children was formed which took the main road running parallel to the railway track, preceded by a wagon-lit white sheet carried high between two walking sticks, to indicate, no doubt, the peaceful intentions of the crowd which followed behind. According to Mary there was absolutely no one visible either on the road or on the surrounding expanse of stubble, when after half an hour's slow march a group of horsemen was discerned approaching from the distance along the main road. Correctly estimating it to be a cavalry patrol the crowd promptly tried to conceal their presence by lining the bottom of the roadside ditches. The patrol, German as they proved to be, ambled by taking no notice whatsoever of the terrified faces peeping from the ditch, and the column resumed their march. Shortly afterwards another, this time a Russian, patrol came along: the whole process was repeated with the additional humiliation that the feeble cheer led by Mary was also entirely ignored. Two hours later Virballen was reached, where the Russian train was waiting to take them in complete peace-time comfort to their destination.

I saw my brother off to the front with the *Garde à Cheval*, of which he commanded the 5th Troop; ever since the Empress Elizabeth's days, when the regiment was formed, at least one of my family had belonged to it. With a more than distinguished record up to the entry of the Allies in Paris in Napoleon's days,

this second regiment of the Imperial Guards which, as it happened, had not seen active service for exactly one hundred years, was now going out for the last time to uphold its old glory right up to its dissolution.

Meanwhile my ship, its readiness nearly complete, had moved out of the river to Kronstadt for a spell of preliminary training before joining the Battle Squadron at the forward bases of Sveaborg and Reval. Kronstadt, another creation of Peter the Great, and since his time the main base of the Baltic Fleet, housed in one of its oldest buildings amid the gloomy Naval Barracks the Officers' Assembly Rooms normally the dismal haunt of retired Flag Officers and Captains, served by no less ancient ratings. Now it had a membership swollen beyond recognition, composed of all ranks and branches of the service engaged in a riot of gossip and rumours that never ended from early morning till late at night. Therefore an evening or two spent there enabled us, the mobilised reservists, to make up for time lost in outer darkness and regain the feel of that closely integrated corporation which the officers of any navy inevitably form.

It was in these surroundings that a sensation was confirmed, which I had felt from the first days of rejoining, of a very definite change in the spirit of the service that had taken place in the years when I had been otherwise occupied. The mutual confidence and trust that officers and men bore to each other seemed to be profoundly shaken: the seditious troubles in the Navy in 1905, culminating in the mutiny of the *Potemkin*, though by now well in the past, continued to cast their shadow. In concentrated form, the same spirit that underlay the agrarian disturbances of that period was then abroad in the conscript peasant sailors of the Fleet.

It strikes me that quite often in the past, navies, rather than armies, have shown themselves to be sensitive barometers in times of general trouble brewing: *vide*, for example, the R.N.

at the Nore and, more recently, at Rosythe, or the French in Odessa, and elsewhere, in the 1920's. Not that such speculation obtruded itself on me at the time—all I felt was that both sides, officers and men, had withdrawn from each other and, what is more, this fact was not only accepted, especially by the younger officers, but even fostered among them, with all possible support from above. Stricter discipline, more formality in dress and harsher and more frequent punishment for petty crimes, were the outward manifestations of that state of affairs; even movement on deck had taken on a sort of goosesteppy barrack square appearance, substituting for the loose, shuffling, sailors' run of the old days. No rating would now presume to address his officer by name and patronymic, or mention him as Mr.—of old his privilege as compared to the soldier—or think of going of an evening to his cabin to have a chat about some trouble back home.

This, however, did not in any degree affect the keenness of all ranks to get to grips with the enemy—in that respect the Navy was at one with the rest of the country and the Army in particular. There was also the fact that both on the material side, and in training, great things had been achieved since the disasters in the Pacific, and this made all the younger men, both officers and ratings, only dimly conscious of any change, and rather proud of the sense of efficiency the new régime gave them.

To the mobilised older men, such as myself, all this progress was difficult to assimilate, another source of discomfort which made my service in the *Poltava*, as the first months of the war passed by, increasingly something of an ordeal, the more so as the respect accorded to the battle-scarred veteran by my shipmates, nearly all my juniors in years but ranking senior in service, was gradually wearing off.

By early spring the *Poltava* concluded her battle training in

and around Kronstadt and joined the main forces on the forward line based on Sveaborg and Reval, constituting the outer defence of Petersburg from the sea. Watchkeeping, at all times a tedious job, did not gain in attractiveness when performed on board a battleship, cruising in various formations backwards and forwards behind a belt of minefields, under the close supervision of a flagship constantly breaking out in a rash of flag-signals. All this without any chance of the enemy getting near enough for action as far as one could foresee.

The outer world seemed to have forgotten about my existence, in fact about the only news I had from the outside was when, one day in May, a telegram from a cousin informed me of my brother Pierre's death—killed in action on the German front.

Seconded to the 1st East Siberian Cossacks for the duration of the Japanese War, soon after he had got his commission in the *Garde à Cheval*, he had had, for a junior officer, a responsible and distinguished career in Manchuria. A much noted exploit of his was when, leading a patrol of his Cossacks in a reconnaissance, he disappeared deep behind the Japanese line for more than ten days, successfully rejoining our front with his men, with valuable information and also a complete Japanese patrol in tow as prisoners. This was only one of a number of encounters out of which he emerged scot-free. Not so this time—in nearly every action he took part in he stopped a bullet: three in all before the fourth killed him at Rudopolianka, somewhere in Lithuania where his troop was covering the evacuation of a small station on the main line to Petrograd. All he had time to say before he died was: "one more". It was very disappointing; the first three wounds, though light in themselves, had, nevertheless, affected his general health a good deal, and this entitled him to a staff job at the rear, but even when such an appointment was offered him he refused it and, still convalescent from his third wound, rejoined his troop. In

his opinion the regiment, having by that time lost more than half of its complement of officers, was in need of him. Undoubtedly a soldier born and bred and a very excellent horseman and sportsman, he was by nature a rather silent, though thoughtful, creature, who had the surprising gift of singing an improvised and remarkably apt second part to any melody performed in his presence.

I was glad that night in May to go on anchor watch at midnight, to be able to grieve for him all by myself. By a strange coincidence the brother of the gunnery chief of the forward turret of which I was in charge happened to be the sergeant-major of Pierre's troop—he had been killed sometime before—we both reservists, and they regulars. Since the beginning of the war I had been uneasy in the back of my mind about Pierre's fate: the cause was something that happened to me in 1909 or '10. At that time the name of an Austrian clairvoyant, Chirski, was bandied about freely in Petersburg society, especially, of course, amongst the ladies. A friend of mine, afraid to go alone, asked me to accompany her and to go in first: I did so and Chirski, quiet and intelligent looking, after giving me a very good character sketch, and a rough outline of a fairly promising future and long life, said: "There is one thing, however, which I think I must warn you about. As far as I can see when you are thirty-three years of age, the sudden death of your brother will occur in circumstances which, though tragic, will not surprise you."

Pierre's death increased the despondent feelings I had about my job, and I decided to find a way out. There is one thing which never changes in the Navy: an astute creature who knows his way about "under the spire", with which Peter the Great had crowned the clock tower of the Admiralty, could achieve a great deal more than a minor change in the complement of watchkeepers on a battleship. It so happened that a number of the more important bottle-washers of that ancient

and noble institution were of my time and some had been close friends from Port Arthur days. Contact was established on my very next forty-eight hours leave to town and after I had succeeded, not without difficulty, in slackening their really quite immoderate thirsts, I was rewarded by the promise to see what could be done for me in the way of a command of a tramp requisitioned as auxiliary armed transport in the Black Sea. I rejoined my ship with a rosy prospect of a first independent command in a fleet due to carry, as popular rumour had it, an irresistible expeditionary force to the shores of the Bosphorus in a sea infested by the elusive German cruisers *Goben* and *Breslau*.

But not for long was I left to indulge in these agreeable fancies. One fine Sunday morning, with the *Poltava* at anchor in the roadstead of Reval, I was keeping watch till noon, pacing the quarterdeck and listening to the chants of our fine choir singing mass on the maindeck below, when a yeoman handed me a signal just come through from the flagship: I was to report immediately to the Flag Captain. A few minutes to hand over the watch and I was on my way to the *Petropavolsk*; and amazed and delighted I was to receive the staggering news—to proceed forthwith to Petrograd to report to the Admiralty for instructions for a confidential mission to London.

The idea having originated with him, the Flag Captain kindly let me have the gist of it then and there. Sometime before the German light cruiser *Magdeburg*, hard-pressed by our forces, had been driven ashore on the island of Oesel, and abandoned by its crew. In so doing the German navigator, incredible as it may seem, failed to take with him, or at least destroy, the copy of the main signal book, in use by the German Navy since the beginning of the war. It was discovered by our people in its customary place in the charthouse of the *Magdeburg*.

The secret of this discovery was so well kept that the Ger-

mans continued to use the same code throughout the war, with incalculable advantage to the Allies. I was to carry to the British Admiralty a copy of this book. Moreover my mission was to be put to a further use—I was to study, under the guidance of the R.N., the plan and conditions of London's air defences with the option of staying in England for as long as would be necessary to enable me to report on them as fully as possible.

Ten days later I was on my way by rail to Archangel, in civilian clothes, all complete with a satchel, worn slung over my shoulder on a strap, containing the code, with a large piece of lead sewn in to enable me to jettison it in case of emergency—an extremely inconvenient way of carrying, not to speak of hiding, the fat little volume. I was in the best of spirits; the Far North had always attracted me, and the foretaste of an arctic oceanic crossing, even as a passenger, would help clear away the noisome vapours of the Baltic puddle. At that time, strange as it may seem now, Archangel was the only port from which the West could be reached at all, with the land front stretching right across from sea to sea, and the entry of Turkey into the war closing the Bosphorus. On arrival I found that I would have to wait a few days while a Russian Volunteer Fleet steamer was being got ready for its journey to Hull, and impatient as I was to get on, in the end I did not mind this delay at all—I could not help but be enchanted by the extraordinary beauty of the town. On high ground, bordering the enormous river a quarter of a mile broad, calm and majestic and yet fast flowing, stretched the three parallel main streets of the one-storied timber houses, dominated by three seventeenth-century churches, spaced out with the largest in the middle—the golden onions of their cupolas reflecting the oblique rays of the mid-night sun, are of the many sights I have seen, all over the world, perhaps the most impressive in weird and uncanny splendour. Just as this view seemed to set one back right into

the days of Ivan the Terrible, so did the population—the most “old Russian” in behaviour, dress and speech that one had ever come across, as if preserved under the semi-eternal ice of their surroundings.

So strong was the historical impact of this strange town on me that at first the complete absence of anything that could be described as an important sea-port did not strike me—but such was the case. The explanation was quite simple; normally Archangel exported timber and this was loaded direct from the numerous timber mills strung out along the fifty miles of the channel of the delta into which the lower Dvina splits before it reaches the White Sea.

When I arrived there, the projected port to receive, through the summer, the stream of war material due from the West, had just been started at the railhead a few miles up the river on the opposite shore. All the tremendous activity involved in this, and the assembly of a fleet of icebreakers to prolong the navigable season, was controlled by a Naval C.-in-C., and to his office I, of course, immediately reported. His staff consisted of a collection of “dugouts”, and was headed, to my surprise, by another man of my kind, the Marshal of Nobility of the Government of Kostroma, a retired Captain who, though by years my senior, greeted me with open arms. During my week’s stay at Archangel I couldn’t help taking the keenest interest in all that was going on—so much so that I nearly forgot the reason which brought me there!

But in the end I landed at Hull after an uneventful, though interesting crossing, which took us as far north as Bear Island, and was disturbed only by a few vague U-boat warnings as we approached England. We made port late in the day and I, the only passenger, reached the Immigration Officer after nightfall. In spite of my papers, proclaiming to the world the importance of my secret mission, it took some time, and the filling up of a number of forms, to persuade this worthy official that I was

neither an immigrant from Poland, nor alternatively a German spy—the latter due obviously to my name.

A night in a slow train brought me to the Embassy at dawn; I went straight up to my parents' bedrooms—to meet them for the first time after Pierre had gone. The few poignant words—all that passed between us—were not allowed to detract from the main object of all our lives at the time.

So, having respectfully, though not without difficulty, routed out the Rear-Admiral who was our Naval attaché, we proceeded together, still very early in the morning, to the Admiralty, to be greeted there with great enthusiasm on delivery of my precious satchel. I was given the assurance of all possible help in the second object of my mission, not without, a certain, though veiled, surprise, however, as both the actual aerial defences and the rather hazy plans for the future, were still in their embryonic stages. The Admiralty promised to let me know at once when something of interest was happening, or was about to happen and gave me all the necessary passes to look around as much and wherever I pleased.

My experiences as an observer can soon be told: an urgent message from the Admiralty brought me, one night, to its roof in Whitehall to watch the tail end of the Zeppelin raid during which a theatre in the Strand was hit. I was told that the audience had behaved in a very distinguished way, either by keeping their seats in an orderly fashion, singing patriotic songs, or walking out of the theatre ditto—anyhow no one was hurt and the damage caused by the bomb insignificant. I arrived on the scene rather late and all I saw was a vague receding shape appearing intermittently in the beams of a few searchlights through the heavy clouds with, from time to time, an isolated shell bursting in its wake. Another curious picture has stayed in my mind's eye; all the main thoroughfares visible from our height, full of traffic during the raid, became quite empty after it was over and stayed so for the rest of the night.

One or two visits to single naval gunsites, dotted about all over the place, mainly, as far as I remember, in the suburbs, some talks at the Admiralty about plans for the future, and hanging about waiting for another raid, which never materialised, sum up my professional activities during the remainder of my three weeks' stay in London. Of my friends I saw very few: literally all the men were away at the front or in training, and the only opportunity I had to do so was a small informal party at Venetia Montague's. I went to it in uniform which, I remember, was voted much too simple, and therefore unbecoming.

For the rest, dimmed-out London seemed to carry on in a fairly normal way, with, as yet, comparatively few uniforms visible, not enough, in any case to change its outward appearance—it was, of course, early days. A two days' visit to Paris, which I contrived to fit in, under one pretext or another, has left a complete blank in my mind, from which I conclude that there also no great change had as yet taken place, in spite of the nearness of the front and Big Bertha.

A few days would have sufficed to get all the information available, but my stay was prolonged by a special circumstance—I had to wait for my return shipment, and a most interesting one it proved to be. The British Naval Intelligence had somehow got hold of the German re-coding tables which, together with the signal code I had brought completed the Allied knowledge of the German signalling system. These tables, reproduced on onion paper, I was to take back to Petrograd, but, as the matter was urgent, this time via Norway and Sweden to the Russo-Finnish frontier, as the whole journey by that route would take not more than three days. But of course these countries were neutral and, what is more, Sweden openly—at least at that stage of the war—favouring Germany: therefore I had to go as a civilian, with the "war material", under the threat of confiscation in neutral territory, sewn into the lining of my waistcoat. The very reason I had come out to England

the longer way was that the bulky code book could not be so treated, and concealed, in the same manner.

I was given a diplomatic pass indicating that I was returning quite naturally, from a visit to my father, but still the position was delicate—if discovered I would have been interned, everything confiscated, and what was more important, the Germans would have got to know about it, and changed their code.

At the time the wife of a Russian naval officer, with a grown-up niece attached, had been somehow stranded in London, and was returning to Russia by the same route, and the idea arose in the minds of the powers that be that if I was instituted as an escort for these two ladies this would enhance the camouflage. And so we arrived, all together, one early morning in Oslo. By that time the state of my nerves, never good, was in a very poor condition, in view of the approaching Swedish frontier, and the company of these two chattering females, who knew nothing of my mission had become quite intolerable. We had a quarter of an hour's wait at Oslo before boarding the through train to the Russian frontier, and I, no doubt for the sake of my country and the Allies' sacred cause, committed a breach of confidence—I sent them off as they stood without their luggage, to breakfast, telling them that we had more than an hour to spare and that they could take their time over it. As they had not had anything to eat since we boarded the boat at Hull the previous night they were quite prepared to do so. The scheme worked—our train left without them, and I slipped through Sweden quietly alone, sending them a message, when I was safely over the Russo-Finnish border that all their belongings were intact at the Russian custom's house. Later I did go and call to apologise for my dreadful "mistake"—after all, she was the wife of a high-ranking Flag Officer.

Yet another surprise was in store for me "under the spire" when I gaily appeared there to claim my promised Black Sea command. My friends told me there was indeed a new appoint-

ment waiting for me, but not in the Black, but in the White Sea. It transpired that while I was away, Archangel, impressed by my nosiness about their affairs, had decided to employ me for good, and against only slight resistance from my "bottle-washer" friends, got their way. So off I went again to my new appointment as Senior Staff Officer, Special Duties, to the C.-in-C., Archangel, and destined to remain in the Far North until the fateful spring of 1917.

If there ever was an overworked staff it was ours; we were comparatively few, all "dug-outs" from the most varied occupations, supervising innumerable jobs, hardly any of them coming within the scope of a naval officer's normal duties. A new port was under construction up the river, another at its mouth and a railway line being extended to the Arctic coast—all this on top of the daily routine of co-ordinating the shipping.

Our chief trouble was that there was no precedent for all this activity, and nearly everything had to be improvised. Take, for instance, the problem of sorting the innumerable items of mixed cargo that were pouring in daily from England and the West. Tonnage was scarce, every foot of available space in the ships was used, and hurried loading resulted in a chaotic mixture emerging from the holds. The representatives of various importers were in the greatest difficulties in trying to find their goods, till at last a very curious remedy was found. The customs staff of two frontier stations were transferred in their entirety to Archangel; all their lives they had done nothing but sort mixed cargoes! This solution worked perfectly and was satisfactory in every way as long as the customs people were allowed to charge customs dues; they insisted they could not work their system otherwise. Let the importers be refunded afterwards, they had to charge them . . . In one case this even helped. The newly built Tambov munition works had been

screaming for some time for the missing half of an electric motor and in spite of all our efforts the part could not be found anywhere in the port, with the customs staunchly refusing to admit its loss. In the end, after frantic entreaties from us, they investigated again and suddenly announced: "But this motor was charged as a complete installation, according to the dues paid. Of course, we have some *parts* here not yet paid for," and took us directly to the other half, standing in a corner of the customs' shed . . .

Events of a different and of the gravest kind were taking place at Bakharitza, such as the explosion of the S.S. *Dresden*, loaded to the brim with H.E. in bulk direct from New York and a few days after its arrival, completely destroying four other ships berthed next to it and at a cost of not less than 2,000 casualties, more than half of them killed or maimed for life—there would have been many more had it not happened during dinner time.

I saw the explosion from about a mile away—going up to Bakharitza in a launch: an enormous black column of smoke rose straight into the air, spreading out into a mushroom shape and followed at once by a smaller one. The reverberation of the sound and the impact of the air when it reached us in the launch a few seconds later was quite tremendous; it deafened us for some time. When I reached the quay ominous fires had begun to spread amongst the cargoes stacked between the railway sidings, but already crowds of stevedores and dockers were returning from their dining-halls, and were able to cope with the fires successfully. One of my duty officers had a strange escape; when the *Dresden* went up he was standing, as he perfectly well remembered, on railway siding 3. The explosion transferred him through the air to siding 9, quite unhurt and without even a bruise but stripped of his greatcoat, which was found 50 yards away.

This disaster was conclusively proved an act of sabotage:

a time-bomb had been laid in the ship's hold by its Captain, a Finn, who escaped and was never found. His accomplice, the Bosun, confessed to all this, and to the 20,000 dollars they had received from German agents in the neutral U.S.

There was one more catastrophe of this kind, but this was caused not by enemy action, but by negligence in loading; some light inflammable phosphorus in barrels had been stored in a hold with boxes of black powder in a ship berthed at Mamaksa, the subsidiary landing-stage established at the mouth of the river, free of ice a month longer than the river itself. This explosion caused the loss of three ships and 400 dead alone, nearly half of them women.

These women, employed as dockers, belonged to that remarkable and, I think, purest strain of Russians established on the shores of the White Sea: the Mongol invasion in the thirteenth century never got anywhere near those shores, colonised a century before from Novgorod the Great. Archangel, on the Northern Dvina, Kola, on the Arctic coast and Kema, on the western shore of the White Sea—where I have myself attended a service in a timber church dating back to the thirteenth century—were the far flung trading posts of that great republic of early Russian days.

Most of these *pamori*, i.e. "seaside dwellers" were mainly fishermen supplying, in winter, Moscow and Central Russia with frozen fish. "Seaside dwellers" sounds clumsy in English, but emphasises for my countrymen the fact that until the seventeenth century the White Sea was the only one whose shores were inhabited by Russians.

A sturdy, extremely independent race of fishermen peasants, they had never been serfs throughout their history. They were extremely adventurous, and that not only at sea, where in small craft they discovered Novoe Zemlia and other Arctic regions, but in cultivation of the soil too; in one district they had grown wheat from time immemorial. No one knows how

this hardy strain of corn was established, but the fact remains that the nearest wheatfield to be found was hundreds of miles due south. Their women, still dressed in the old traditional costume, using flowered silks for their skirts and gold brocade, trimmed with fur, for their jackets, took a large part in all the work,—both on land and water. On a windless day one could often see one of their large boats coming across the river, with twelve women, old and young, at the oars, rowing the slow, perfectly-timed stroke of a seafaring race, with a man, also dressed in the traditional kaftan and dangling fur-trimmed cap, standing upright at the steering oar. Both men and women are strikingly capable and can turn a hand to any kind of work, if willing to do so; but the trouble was that, apart from the fact that there were not enough of them to go round, they were extremely conscious of their ancient privileges, and only with great difficulty and exorbitant remuneration could be persuaded to do anything except supply fish for the rest of Russia and grow their own food.

As it was not tainted by any Tartar words their speech is extremely “pure”, and in speaking with them one was forcibly reminded of Count Alexei Tolstoi’s historical drama in verse about the times of Ivan the Terrible. These *pamori* were, for me, the living background of Russia’s extreme north, by which for a time I was completely captivated; before one has lived in high latitudes one imagines that nothing could be gloomier, but one sequence of seasons spent there does away with that picture for ever.

It is true that the summer lasts only three months, but it is three months of nearly constant sunshine when everything is breeding and growing in a state of perpetual exhilaration. If you happen to lie down in a river meadow for a rest, dressed in drill because it is so hot that you could stand no other garments, you wake up a few hours later with the grass around grown several inches higher and beginning to shade you from

the sun! Nobody seems to go to bed, and you see people about all through the twenty-four hours. But after a short transitional period night invades again; it gets colder and colder, life just diminishes in tempo, and, for the local population at least, comes gradually to a nearly complete standstill. This is the time when all the traditional extremely elaborate customs centring around Christmas take their slow and measured progress, and they still included, in my time, the interminable recital of the lays of ancient Russia.

But at least once every few years this winter somnolence is violently interrupted. On a still night of hard frost the always present vague beams of northern lights begin, without apparent reason, to increase in numbers and behave as if they were searching for a focus at a certain point of the horizon; if you are a newcomer, you are amazed to notice that the population, is all out in the dark streets, chattering excitedly. And then it starts—two scrolls of molten gold slowly build themselves up on opposite sides of the terrestrial horizon and so luminous are they that the brilliant stars begin to fade. These scrolls expand, shading over into silver through all the ranges of a most intense rainbow, preceded by short intermittent bursts of diagonal beams between them, and move towards each other till an enormous incredibly elaborate shining structure of columns erects itself over the sky, stationary but at the same time filled with undulating movement. And then you begin to hear, or you imagine that you hear, a melodious reverberation which comes and goes in such a strange fashion that you don't quite know if it is really there or not, and then slowly the structure begins to fade, two or three times starts fitfully to build itself again and gradually dissolves. Night has come again with only a few miserable northern lights doing their best to relieve it, and everyone is back in bed, adding one more vision to their treasured memories of *aurora borealis*.

The curious stimulus given to northerners' imagination by

their long winter's rest was confirmed when one evening I was called to the telephone. Over it a local cobbler announced that as a faithful subject of the Tsar, he felt duty bound to report a Zeppelin anchored on the meadows across the river, which had just let down two rope ladders, already used by Germans descending in large numbers on to the snowy plain. I looked out of the window across the river into the dim semi-darkness, produced at that time of the year by the sun just below the horizon, and saw Mars and Venus, two planets, one red, the other white, brilliantly shining close together. We had to get that cobbler up to the Staff Office, and explain this nocturnal phenomenon at some length to him, before we managed to persuade him that the two planets were *not* the riding-lights of a Zeppelin.

The work of a Special Duties Officer on a small staff regulating a vast, entirely improvised, and rapidly growing organisation, was to be at hand whenever anything went wrong. I had a very busy time indeed, even in the depths of winter, when the whole world around seemed to be frozen dead: means had to be devised to avoid blunders of the previous navigation and guard against mistakes in the future. As general liaison and intelligence officer, I was also harbour-master, shipping clerk, foreman stevedore, ice-breaker and railway traffic regulator—all these jobs had to be taken on temporarily, always at a moment when a complete jam or breakdown was threatening, and then only until a really competent person could be unearthed from somewhere to straighten things out. Considering that when I started I knew next to nothing about transport, maritime or otherwise, I am still amazed how I kept my job at all—perhaps it was my inveterate optimism that soothed the ruffled tempers of my superiors.

I was also entrusted with the prevention of infiltration by enemy agents, and had to keep an eye on the slight passenger traffic—mostly importers' agents on government business. In

this connection I had to take part in an incident, which to this day disturbs me, and at the same time increased the aversion I always felt against all secret service activities and its methods, however necessary and unavoidable.

One day we were advised that a very important enemy agent—code name A.17—was on his way to Petrograd via Archangel, and not only were we not to interfere with his free passage, but, if necessary, to give him every help and assistance; the ultimate object being to let him, if possible, guide our counter espionage people to his contacts in Petrograd. He was a Belgian and was travelling from England as the representative of a French firm—as one of several passengers on a boat carrying a load of stuff belonging to his firm. Owing to minor engine trouble the boat, instead of coming direct to Archangel, had to take shelter for a few days at Alexandrovsk, a small fishing port on the Arctic coast. The local police chief, delighted to have something out of the way to do in that God forsaken place, thoroughly investigated all the passengers and discovering a perfectly innocent commercial code book in A. 17's luggage, promptly arrested our man and enthusiastically reported the fact to us. In no time we were flooded with angry complaints from every possible quarter and had the whole official French Trade Mission at Archangel on our necks—A. 17 was representing a very important and influential French firm. Of course, he was immediately released and even given a copy of our "severe reprimand" to the miserable police chief, by now a scapegoat of a minor inter-allied incident.

A few days later A.17 arrived in Archangel where he not only received, through me, the most profuse apologies from our C.-in-C., but was, together with the Trade Mission, a guest of honour at a small farewell banquet at which I had to preside. He was a large Flamand with a round florid face, obviously in the best of spirits, very pleased, no doubt, by the sense of security the whole incident must have given him. All through

the meal he entertained me at length in fluent French, with the strong Teutonic accent of his race, about German atrocities in Belgium—then the *dernier cri* in such matters—and also about his wife and five children, so safe and snug at home in England . . . And there was I, making the journey to his doom as comfortable as possible. Six weeks later I had to advise the French Trade Mission that he had, unfortunately, met with an accident that cost him his life, and request the appointment of a new representative for the firm.

But to relieve the bad taste that this recollection leaves, here is another incident, this time an attempt to get out of Russia. One day the Police Inspector of a rather slummy outlying district of Archangel reported that two unusual strangers had taken up residence at a low-class lodging house—the only one in the district. Their papers seemed in order, but for something discovered by his clerk who, having not much to do anyway, had given those passports special attention: he found that though issued in widely distant parts of Russia, the official signature on them was in the same hand, a circumstance which allowed that shrewd officer to presume forgery.

When the two young men were brought up to me all was over in a few minutes: one of them was a German civil prisoner, rounded up at the beginning of the war. He was born and had lived all his life in Russia, except for a few years at school in Germany, and his Russian was as good as a native's and his German poor. The other, a lieutenant of the German Guards Artillery, had been taken prisoner at the battle of Lodz, and he had no Russian at all. Both had been interned in a camp in the Urals, had somehow got hold of forged documents and had invented the rather ingenious plan of making their way, by a coastal passenger boat, to Vængør fjord, only a few miles from the then practically unguarded Norwegian frontier. Having correctly estimated the break-up of the ice on the river Dvina they safely arrived at Archangel in good time, only to

discover that the navigation on the White Sea opened about a month later than on the river.

They had to wait, and succeeded in taking a room in the two overcrowded hotels in the centre of the town, full of a mixed crowd of mostly shady characters dealing in the trickle of contraband of all sorts—unavoidable, it seems, when an enormous flow of “mixed cargo” arrives in hundreds of ships. Incidentally I myself have to confess to a case of whisky from a friend in England, pompously handed over to me by the captain of an American boat and, much worse, because perpetrated on my own initiative, to a splendid boar and two sows for Sosnofka as successors to Ali Baba and his wives, who came over with a consignment of anti-philoxerra spray for which wine growing co-operatives in the Caucasus had been clamouring for a long time. But life in those hotels was very expensive, and my fugitives, afraid to run short of money, moved to a cheap lodging-house, conspicuous in its isolation, where the leisure of a curious police clerk led to their undoing. But nothing worse happened to them in the end than reinternment, at the State’s expense, in their camp behind the Urals, there to await the end of the war.

It was towards the middle of the summer of ’16, when I had been at Archangel just about a year, that the construction of a railway line to the Arctic shore—open to navigation all through the winter with the help of the gulf stream—was nearing completion; and some sort of traffic was promised for the coming autumn and winter. The projected railhead was to be established half-way up a fjord leading to Kola, the ancient starting point of the Viking infiltration into Russia in the eighth and ninth centuries. Here, and only here, the inaccessibly steep rock wall of the fjord was, on the eastern side, bordered by a

few acres of comparatively flat ground, sloping in a gentle fall of sandbank towards a roadstead three-quarters of a mile broad, capable of giving anchorage, on bad holding ground, to ships of any draught in small numbers.

It was on the shores of this sandbank that landing stages, on piles, to berth three to four ships, were nearly finished, together with a number of barracks and warehouses. This new port had been named Murmansk, and it replaced Kola, from which all through the preceding winter, a limited amount of small arms and ammunition had been making its way on reindeer sledges to Finland—in those days a Russian Grand Duchy.

This particular operation was an autonomous enterprise of a naval officer of Polish origin, Rokossovsky by name: a dug-out, too, and a few years my senior. A man of indomitable energy and ungovernable temper, he was well known in the Navy as the man who threw overboard the Captain of a Japanese destroyer, who had come to supervise in person the removal of the gun locks of the destroyer under Rokossovsky's command, which had been obliged to take refuge and disarm in the neutral Chinese port, Che-fu. Mobilised in 1914, he found himself—more or less like me—out of touch and, taking matters into his own hands, he invented a job for himself. He must have had some previous knowledge of Lapland and the Lapps, because when he discovered that a shortage of small arms and machine guns was one of the main troubles in the army, that was where he went to remedy this difficulty, and his efforts were, to everyone's surprise, very successful indeed.

The Lapps were still living under a tribal régime and entirely dependent for their food, clothing and shelter—in fact for their entire existence—on reindeer; the average Lapp household owned a herd of one to three hundred reindeer, but the chiefs, or princes, counted their herds in tens of thousands, and were very rich men indeed. I cannot tell how Rokossovsky achieved it, or what pressure he brought to bear on them, but the fact

remains that small arms and ammunition were being conveyed by reindeer in a constant flow from Kola to a railhead in Finland, at least 200 miles away.

We, at Archangel, though vaguely conscious that all this was going on, had nothing whatever to do with it, till a long telegram from Kola arrived. It was couched in a sort of Biblical language, telling our C.-in-C: "That wives and children were crying in the corners of their huts, that certain doom was, in the immediate future, to overtake the whole loyal nation of Lapps. That chiefs and commoners united in humble prayer to the almighty hand of the sacred person of the Emperor and his representative to relieve them and to help the utter distress into which the demands of the 'Warlord' had plunged them." Utter consternation at our staff until, fortunately, a Lapp deputation, consisting of three men and two women, followed the telegram at a few days' distance.

When I took them up to be introduced to the C.-in-C., I was happy to discover that one of the men, though dressed in the traditional furs, addressed me in educated Russian. He explained in a few words the whole situation; it transpired that Rokossovsky was violently objecting to the release of the enormous number of reindeer he employed for his transport, for the yearly slow migration to the southern meadows, where the reindeer spent every summer, arguing that spring was still three months away and it was much too early even to think of suspending transport operations. According to my Lapp informant, Rokossovsky did not understand that if the slow migration of the innumerable reindeer herds was undertaken too late in the year, it would risk bogging them in the treacherous thawing surface of the "tundra"—the permanently frozen soil on which nothing but a special moss grows, the reindeer's winter subsistence for which they migrate northwards in autumn.

The issue was clear—but the only way to make Rokossovsky see reason was to offer him another job. And this was found in

the nearly impossible task of establishing a new lighthouse on an inaccessible island at the entrance to the White Sea, which he nevertheless brought to a successful conclusion with the assistance of his crew of volunteers—nearly all inmates of the Central Naval Prison, which happened to be at Archangel.

But to return to Murmansk: the construction of the railway and Port Murmansk itself had been, up till then, entirely in the hands of the proper departments of the Ministry of Communications. The military and naval authorities had nothing to do with it, but the time for taking over had come, as the first train reached the railhead and the first landing stages were ready. A miniature replica of our Archangel staff was assembled, complete with harbour-master, R.T.O., shipping office in charge of stevedores and dockers, a number of duty officers, and the inevitable customs office—this time from a station on the Austrian border. Two small coastal passenger boats were requisitioned as living quarters for this crowd, and I was put in charge of the whole show.

Some time in early September I took my two ships to sea, and, after an uneventful passage, entered the Kola fjord in line ahead, proudly flying—for the first and last time—my own recognition signal, as O.C., Maritime Transport, Murmansk. This dignified and euphonious title was invented for me by my great friend, Commander Bevan, R.N., of the Resident British Transport Mission at Archangel: not so much, I suspect, to please me, as to spite my own C.-in-C.—for the latter I always remained nothing more than one of his own staff temporarily in charge of operations at Murmansk. There was never much love lost between the two: the Englishman, an active Commander of the Royal Navy, rather young in years for his rank, and the Russian, one of the oldest Vice-Admirals of the Imperial Navy, in whose heart the memories of the Crimean War still rankled.

There were quite a number of Anglophobes among the

senior officers in the Far North at that time: there was, for instance, the dug-out in charge of coastal defences who was very busy establishing six-inch coastal batteries at the mouth of the Kola fjord as a protection against the British—if you please!—as he openly proclaimed at every possible occasion. I must in all fairness say that their British counterparts, of whom two or three appeared from time to time on our horizon, heartily responded in kind.

In about a week, having taken over from the Civil Port Engineer in charge of construction, I had my people organised and started on the few ships already waiting. At first shipping dribbled in at a very slow rate. But soon, as the river at Archangel and the White Sea became ice-bound, the pressure increased till towards the end of the year we were going full out with six ships unloading simultaneously, and not less than the same number at anchor in the roadsteads waiting to come alongside.

One of my chief worries was the permanent congestion of the long but narrow roadstead, the more so as very soon it had to accommodate a number of permanent guests. There were, to begin with, some of our own ships, lost to the Japanese at Port Arthur, and now returned by them as a gesture of inter-Allied courtesy. Amongst them were two of my old ships, the first *Poltava* and the destroyer *Grozovoi*; their familiar silhouettes were a constant eyesore, and I could not make myself set foot on board either of them—they had, after all, flown the Rising Sun for over ten years. There was also a nearly obsolete British battleship, flying the pennant of the Senior Officer Commanding Arctic: it was supposed to protect and serve as base for the so-called “mystery” ships—camouflaged armed merchantmen used in those days in the U-boat hunt. Of these also one or two were always about refuelling or taking in supplies.

These naval forces were supposed to protect our Arctic lines of communication against an onslaught of the German

Hochseeflotte; they would have been much better able to do so from the well sheltered and deep port at Alexandrovsk, directly on the shores of the Arctic, but there the holding ground was so bad as to be practically non-existent in an even moderate northern gale. Another consequence of the presence of all these forces, in what I considered my special preserve, was that, soon after my arrival, another naval shore establishment materialised about half a mile away in a barracks speedily built on top of the rocky range of hills bordering the fjord; this was the H.Q. of the Russian C.-in-C. Arctic and contained an amiable Rear-Admiral, a staff of two (Chief of Staff and Secretary) with a few writers and a Bodo—telegraph apparatus—our only link with the outside world.

My organisation did not come directly under this command or, for the matter of that, under anybody else—Archangel having repudiated direct responsibility for me in no uncertain terms from the moment they had become icebound. I was left therefore dangling in mid-air, so to speak, squirming under a running fire of constant proddings, ranging through all the Russian supply departments, with the British and French Admiralties chiming in from time to time.

Meanwhile the railway was working surprisingly well—the hard frozen conditions of the new track making it as steady as a rock—and with some initial labour difficulties successfully overcome, the clearance of the incoming war material was proceeding quite satisfactorily. My life would have been relatively normal, but for a number of sudden emergencies which shattered the peace of the surrounding Arctic night. There was the really heavy northern gale, blowing along the fjord as through a funnel, which dragged the anchors of all the shipping in the roadstead, when the British battleship drifting slowly but surely headed straight for the landing-stages. At the very last extremity she was just prevented from piling up, and crushing all the shipping alongside, by the frantic efforts of all our tugs

or, more probably, by one of her anchors caught at the right moment in a crevasse in the rocky bottom of the fjord.

The scope, variety and eloquence of the deprecatory language I had to endure on that occasion from its worthy, but helpless, commander, passes belief; even by his own subordinates, as they later confidentially admitted, this performance was considered outstanding in every way. But, after all, service in the Arctic night cannot help affecting an elderly gentleman's temper, considering that he had been transferred to that post from the Admiralty Survey in the West Indies, where he had spent the last twenty years before rejoining the R.N. at the outbreak of war.

Somewhat earlier in the year, when we still had some daylight, a ship came in flying distress signals, and requesting immediate help. I went out to see what the matter was and when I stepped on board I was confronted by the captain and his crew hardly able to stand up, their pale faces tinged with green, and a strong smell of some very disagreeable chemical pervading the atmosphere in spite of the wind. Apparently cylinders were stored in one of the holds, full of chlorine, I think—anyway a substance used for making poison gas, and one of them had obviously sprung a leak, and for the last three days was slowly gassing the ship.

The difficulty was to find the particular container which was to blame, and the only way was to send a diver down into the hold—without his weights, of course. As there was no one else available I had to go down, and soon discovered the offending cylinder right at the top. I then left the ship in a hurry, leaving instructions for dumping it overboard. All seemed well till later that night when, already in complete darkness, a dreadful commotion started all over the place—stevedores and dockers and members of the various crews were leaving the landing stages in a crowd, shouting incomprehensible things about being poisoned and refusing to go on with their work.

It turned out that the gas cylinder, instead of being dumped somewhere outside, had been sunk in six feet of water between the ship and the pier, so that the fumes, percolating to the surface had the satisfaction of a more important target than ever before! This difficulty was solved by introducing, not without hazards, a grappling iron beneath the container and towing it out into deep water—but I had a definitely sick feeling for about three days afterwards.

We had quite sufficient labour, and everything went smoothly from that point of view, with a few odd exceptions. A shipping firm, under contract to us, had in its employ quite a number of Chinese stevedores, transferred from their Vladivostock branch; one day it was reported to me that the restricted space, under the floor of their barracks, was now entirely full of coffins, containing the bodies of some of their comrades who had died, and I was asked where to store the body of another who had died that day. As the bodies were all hard frozen I found means to ship them back, via Vladivostock, to China, thereby satisfying the Chinese whose ancestor worship makes burial in native soil an overriding obligation.

Suddenly a Caucasian labour battalion arrived—three to four hundred men from one of the Caspian ports. As they had no winter coats at all I promptly requisitioned some excellent army greatcoats of Spanish provenance, and boots and other clothing from various cargoes which were passing through Murmansk, declared them, as the official Russian term has it, "lost in unforeseeable hazards of the sea", and distributed them to the Caspians. This solution ought to have resulted in my court martial and dishonourable discharge, but did not.

My labour force was a strange mixture indeed. There were also a lot of transients—for such a large passenger boat, of the British Wilson Line, in peace time serving the Baltic generally, was berthed alongside my two ships. It had excellent passenger accommodation, 1st, 2nd and steerage

class and here my transients used to vegetate, sometimes for several weeks, waiting for suitable transport either one way or the other. Amongst them was yet another party of Chinese, this time from Hong Kong, moved by the orders of the British Admiralty, and they, by the continuous burning of joss sticks and fireworks, were supposed to have caused the disaster which followed.

I was aroused from deep sleep by the duty officer with the report that the Wilson steamer was on fire. It is timely to mention here, that the nearest landing stages, only 100 yards away, were then occupied by two ships whose cargo was exclusively explosives. When a few moments later, I reached deck a very disquieting picture appeared in the dim light of the electric standards illuminating the port: columns of billowing smoke were rising from at least two holds in the Wilson boat, although no flames were visible as yet; but all its passengers, and most of the crew, had already left in a panic and were assembled gaping on shore. Around the landing stages, there was some commotion; the smoke had been seen from there too, and something that could easily develop into a stampede was threatening.

In the opposite direction, fifty yards or so further along the shore, the crew of a British pinnace were busily cutting the steel hawser which held the Wilson fast to a boulder. If they had succeeded nothing could have prevented the Wilson from drifting straight into the two H.E. boats, as our tugs, doing their best to come alongside, powerful though they were, were hardly able to move against the tide and the drifting slush.

I reached the Wilson's bow and from there, using bad language myself, succeeded, not without difficulty, in stopping the hawser cutting. I then dispatched my four remaining duty officers in a hurry to the landing stages, to prevent any mischief there. Meanwhile the fire was making considerable progress deep in the holds, but, with flames already shooting up the

ventilator shafts, another problem presented itself—we had no regular fire brigade or any appliances on shore, always relying on the tugs, which were supplied with powerful pumps. At last, after some delay, a small hose was rigged across from one of my boats and, with a motley crowd of the most varied elements, including some customs officials, I tried to get near the heart of the fire and, in doing so, was knocked unconscious by a small explosion, probably of coal gas. This did me no damage, but put me out for about two hours, when I was relieved to hear that my excellent harbour-master had succeeded in towing out with his tugs and sinking the Wilson boat on a sandbank further up the fjord.

Order on the landing stages had been restored, but not without trouble; when the duty officers dispatched by me, reached the scene, the two on watch had already been overrun by the dockers and stevedores. They were only able to restore order by threatening the crowd with their revolvers, and even firing a few blank shots into the air. I was rather glad that the main anxieties of this operation were veiled for me by my knock-out.

Other transients were a top level British Mission, which included, on the finance side, Lord Revelstoke, Maurice Baring's brother. We had an hour's conversation about London and things abroad in general, all that we were able to snatch before a special train took them south. He seemed to be rather anxious about the political situation in Russia—and so, I gathered, was my father—and asked for my opinions; to my amazement I found that I had practically none to offer—so great was the isolation of the busy life I had been leading during the last months.

New Year's Eve that year was one of the most amusing I had ever spent; a few days before a party of a hundred French officers of all ranks and arms, and an even larger number of N.C.O.s, had arrived, on their way to become instructors in the Rumanian Army, then being re-formed on Russian soil

after the Germans had occupied their country. They were a remarkable crowd—not one had been wounded less than three times and all had seen every kind of fighting on the western front. When I was first introduced to them by their senior officer a large, handsome, dark man came up, embraced me, and pressed cheeks in the French fashion, with the greeting: “*Ah, mon cousin, comme je suis content de vous voire sain et sauf*”. He turned out to be one of the Cröys, of whom, I must confess, I had never heard before. This crowd had amongst them men of literally all the professions, which included a good number of actors and every kind of musician, and on New Year’s Eve they gave the most perfect cabaret I was ever privileged to witness, which lasted until well into the morning.

I think, in time of war, that most of us have the feeling of time standing still, or rather that all that is happening to you, while you are taking part in it, will, after it is over be somehow set aside as if in a frame, while you resume the old way of life with all its possibilities and prospects the same as they ever were before. The frame itself will then be stored away in the back of your mind, to be taken out from time to time to pass a few moments, mostly in self admiration, or, perhaps, for display to your nearest and dearest to gain theirs. But while your service keeps you busy filling up the frame, you tuck away out of sight and hearing all your normal life, and that to such an extent that you gradually completely lose touch with it and whatever comes along to remind you is just filed away for use when it resumes its sway.

So strongly had this habit of mind got hold of me in my Arctic isolation that even the news of my father’s death in London early in 1917, did not affect me to any telling degree.

Yet I had been tied to that absent minded and amiable man by such a bond of devotion and admiration that even now I feel, from time to time, the void that his going has left in my life.

It was, by now, spring 1917, and things were going smoothly in the busy life of the port. Then one day in early March an urgent call from my friend on the staff of the Coastal Defences brought me hot foot up the hill, where I found the Admiral and all his staff assembled round the Bodo, watching a long message coming in. Silently the Chief of Staff handed me the beginning; "Order of the Day No. 2, issued by G.H.Q. to all the armed forces." The gist of the whole message was that other ranks were dispensed from saluting their officers, except when actually reporting, or acknowledging orders, and it was countersigned by someone entitled "Representative of the Provisional Government", and named Sokolov.

No such words as consternation or dismay can be sufficient to describe the shattering effect which that message had on all of us. For some utterly inexplicable reason the tremendous events of the past weeks, such as the Emperor's abdication for himself and his son, and the formation of a Provisional Government, had never been transmitted to us from Archangel or any other source. More surprising still, even the telegraphists incessant private gossip bore no trace of such stupendous news. The Admiral, the first to recover from the shock, told us to await developments and carry on meanwhile as if nothing had happened. One or two days later the full blast of the news reached us.

As everywhere else in Russia, the Provisional Government was accepted by us, and, except for a few minor incidents, the whole change did not in any way affect the activities of the port—on the contrary, the great things expected from the new régime in the more energetic prosecution of the war had a tonic effect on us too.

Not long after I was relieved of my post as O.C., Maritime

Transport and transferred to the Central Office of Maritime Transport at Petrograd, of whose existence, until then, I had only a dim notion. One of my last duties at Murmansk was to command a parade at which all the service personnel of the port and a battalion of Russian airmen on their way to the French front, took the oath of allegiance to the new Government.

I never discovered why I was relieved of the one and only independent command I ever held; my superiors seemed quite satisfied with my activities, and after the Wilson boat fire I had been, in special recognition, promoted Lieut.-Commander. However, one had to be prepared for everything in those hectic days, and when, some time in April, the order arrived to report within ten days to Petrograd, I handed over to my senior officer, not without regret, but at the same time looking forward to whatever the future had in store for me.

A day or two before I was due to leave a complication arose; a mission arrived from abroad, consisting of three American Railway men, the very best which that country had at that time to offer in the management of traffic, traction and permanent ways. Their advice was supposed to save the whole Russian railway system from a complete breakdown—due any day now, in the opinion of the highest Allied war councils. They had come all the way from the U.S.A. and had been joined in England by a Frenchman, a young port engineer from Dunkirk. Several hours spent in communication with Archangel over the teletype resulted in my appointment as their guide and liaison-interpreter, to take them south to meet members of the Russian Ministry of Communications, and then proceed on a tour of inspection.

Comfortably accommodated in a ministerial carriage, we spent nearly three weeks together. On a wide circuit we went all over the main northern lines: after an initial foray to Archangel, on to Moscow and Smolensk, we retraced our way to Petrograd, where I left them to take up my duties at Maritime

Transports. The routine of these inspections was that at main junctions a conference was held with representatives of the local Russian railway administration and the situation thoroughly thrashed out in every aspect; all this taking hours and sometimes lasting far into the night.

A delaying factor was the language difficulty; the Americans had only their own, which the Russians had not, and were, therefore, entirely dependent on me—the Frenchman got along more or less by himself, as nearly all the Russian engineers spoke some French. For the interpreter a hampering factor was the difference in the educational standard of the two sides; all our Americans had worked their way up from the ranks, so to speak, and had very little general knowledge. As compared with the Russian and Frenchman, who both had a *grande école* education, about the highest available, this was even reflected in the way purely technical matters were put across. But the real difficulty was the difference of approach to organisational problems. For the Americans the chief object was competition against, and successfully undercutting, other main lines in the same country, whereas for the Europeans, organised co-operation came before all else.

The final report which the Americans presented in Petrograd was a complete surprise to all: they had come to the conclusion that, given the stress of the war, nothing was wrong in the way things were managed, and handsomely admitted that they could have done no better in the States. . .

To me personally, this expedition proved a godsend insofar that it pulled me out of my isolation. A strange, recklessly excited, and entirely optimistic Russia was revealed to me, confident in the irresistible force of their new-born enthusiasm—so far only directed towards the all prevailing aim of victory in the battlefield. Only a very attentive and experienced ear could, as yet, discern the gradual swelling of the ground bass—the eternal question of land tenure.

Gradually I became conscious of the chances I had missed in my Arctic isolation, for, wherever I looked, all executive power in the land had passed into the hands of local government men. Right from the very top, from the members of the Provisional Government itself down to provincial authorities, it was the Zemstvo men who replaced the functionaries of the Imperial régime. To give only one example: my old friend and political associate, the chairman of the executive committee of our provincial Zemstvo, stepped automatically into the shoes of my old enemy, Governor Muratoff.

I was, for a time disgruntled by this, but soon found out what an excellent protection uniform was from party, or even class, obligations and entanglements, while giving a perfect opportunity for unfettered freedom of observation. Therefore, in spite of the many calls to return to political life which eventually reached me, I refused them all and remained in the Navy. This decision, which involved an absolute loyalty to whatever ruling power the people would choose to accept, was, in my opinion, the only honest way to make it possible, at least for a man of my antecedents, to do his duty by his country, locked in a mortal struggle for its very existence with enemies from without and within.

I had ample time and leisure to make up my mind on the lines described above. After having speeded my railway transport mission on its homeward journey from Petrograd, I took up my new appointment at the Central Maritime Transport Office and there I found that there was less than nothing for me to do. I have very little to say about the following aimless two or three months of hanging about in Petrograd; after the strenuous time in the Far North I found myself in a stagnant

backwater—a co-ordinating centre with nothing to co-ordinate. Days of desultory waiting followed with plenty of opportunity for gossip, while hanging about the Admiralty and the two equivalents of Brooks's and White's, the "Yacht" and the "New" Club, or looking up a few relatives not at the front or on other war jobs out of town.

This all amounted to little genuine information about the trend and flow of events, gathering speed at an ever-increasing pace towards the climax, entirely unpredictable in form and influence on the future. Even events of such ultimate importance as the arrival of Lenin at the Finland Station, and his subsequent exile after the abortive July rising, the first manifestation of Bolshevism, left little impression on the vague milieu of tag-ends to which I was, for the time, confined.

This amorphous existence came to a sudden and entirely unexpected termination towards midsummer, when I was informed by the Admiralty that the Minister of Foreign Affairs wanted a word with me, intimating that they themselves would have no objections to my accepting any proposals that might come my way. The Minister concerned was Mr. Tereschenko, one of the largest sugar manufacturers in Russia, and, like all Ministers in the Cabinet of the Provisional Government, a Zemstvo man of fairly radical hue. Mr. Tereschenko told me that a new department had been created at G.H.Q. at Mohilev; and that the chief characteristic of this venture was that it consisted of prominent Zemstvo men, both military and civilian. Tereschenko proposed that I should join this new organisation as Chief Liaison Officer to all the Allied Military Missions attached to the G.H.Q. As to my specific duties there appeared to be no clear definition of these in the Minister's mind. He suggested that I should become as intimate as possible with the foreign missions—which would be easy for me, in view of my diplomatic antecedents and life abroad—and try to clarify to them the Russian internal situation; this I, as a Zemstvo man,

would be better able to do than the regular soldiers on the staff. Slightly bewildered, I felt nevertheless that this sort of job would suit me down to the ground, as it was certainly getting me nearer to the centre of things than I had ever been before. I therefore accepted with considerable pleasure, and betook myself to Mohilev. What I found was the following, and here I shall have to try to explain the general set-up of my particular department at G.H.Q. at that time. Throughout the war a civilian organisation, called the "Zemstvo Federation", composed of volunteers from all branches of the local government administration, had been entrusted with considerable functions behind the line: mostly, of course, in the form of welfare work, construction and other duties of a similar nature. This "Zemstvo Federation" had been represented rather vaguely at G.H.Q., and my new department was formed to amplify its representation and give it the weight which present conditions warranted—it was but one more expression of the political status which, as I mentioned before, the Zemstvo was acquiring through the country.

The Zemstvo Federation could be expected to be a better medium for exerting G.H.Q.'s influence on morale in the field. What it really all came to, though the word was never mentioned, was that this new organisation was for propaganda to counterbalance the influence of the soldier's soviets, beginning to get restive. In later days, such politically important forces as the White Russian Volunteer armies, all, in one way or another, originated from this department.

My special duties having little in common with its main purpose, I spent my time in interminable conversations with officers of various ranks belonging to the Allied Missions, in their very comfortable mess. I soon was able to appreciate their relative degree of importance, and, I think, was trusted by them to give a correct picture of what was going on, and sometimes was even consulted in the drafting of their reports home. I was

briefed entirely by my own G.I. so I never met any of the important Russian commanders in the field, with one notable exception: M. Kerensky, the then head of the Provisional Government, was visiting the front and passing through Mohilev in his train, sent for me, and I had a fairly long interview with him.

M. Kerensky, by profession a lawyer, had been a leader of the extreme right wing of the small Socialist group in the last Duma. An incomparable speaker, he rose to prominence and became head of the Provisional Government after the July rising in Petrograd, when it became clear that his influence, especially with the soldier "soviets" was becoming much greater than that of the Zemstvo leaders. These soldiers' soviets, then entirely in the hands of the Social Revolutionaries, were dominated by the amazing power of his oratory, and the officer class was prepared to accept his moderate brand of socialism.

The occasion upon which he sent for me was not very important in itself—I was to go on a mission, this time with a representative of the Canadian Army; and for this M. Kerensky wanted to brief me himself. For one reason or another it was important to him to make an impression on the Canadian, as distinct from the British, Government. That matter having been settled in a few words, M. Kerensky then asked me to report on the general atmosphere in the Foreign Missions, which I did at some length. I was very much impressed by the knowledge of Russia's international position which he seemed to have at his fingers ends. My recollection of him is of a very sincere and fearless man rather shy in manner, as if not quite sure of the tone that would suit the position into which events had thrust him. This last was particularly noticeable when he mentioned to me, in parting, how great an admiration he always felt for my father "the only statesman amongst the Emperor's representatives abroad", as he put it.

The mission to which this audience was a preliminary turned

out in itself to be singularly lacking in importance—I was to act as guide, protector and interpreter to Colonel Boyle, of the Royal Canadian Engineers, on his visit to the southern part of our front, which included Rumania. The purpose of this visit was to instruct in the handling, and find out the need for, small gauge railways called Decauvilles, both in rails and rolling stock; not a regular soldier, Colonel Boyle was in private life the owner and manager of a small goldmine on the Alaska border. He was a self-made man, of the “Jack London” type, as he said himself, and actually, as a very young man, had taken part in the first gold rush to Klondike. Now, though over forty, this adventurous spirit made him join the R.C.E. for the duration. Decauvilles are well known all over the world for temporary transport; goldmines always used them, both in Russia and Canada—but I could never discover from Colonel Boyle why his country was especially equipped to supply a certain shortage of them on our front. I strongly suspect it was the Canadians themselves who dispatched him to Russia on his strange errand.

Our tour took nearly a month, and consisted mostly of festive occasions with Rumanian and Russian railway engineers behind the front. It again resulted in the expert from abroad coming to the conclusion that, though there was a shortage, the actual handling of existing material was so good that no great hardship was as yet felt. I do think that this expedition was, bar none, the most nonsensical I have ever made, though I did enjoy my one and only visit to Rumania very much indeed.

By the time I regained Mohilev, the elections to the Constituent Assembly had become due. At that time the convocation of this Assembly was felt to herald the solution of all the problems with which the March revolution had confronted the country. The only other major action, that of the expropriation of the landowners, had already started, with the tacit conni-

vance of the Provisional Government, and was proceeding, in varying degrees of intensity, all over the country.

The Constituent Assembly was to be elected on the basis of universal and direct suffrage: it was the first experience of this for more than 90 per cent of Russia's population, as the Duma and Zemstvo Assemblies had been elected by indirect and male suffrage only. The preparation for this event had been going on for a long time, and the number of political platforms and parties which were to be represented kept on increasing, ranging from Monarchists on the extreme right to Anarchists of the most violent persuasion, all intermixed with national groupings, whose inclinations, either to the right or left, were difficult to establish. I personally gave my allegiance to the party of "Democratic Reforms", the only one I ever so favoured, headed enthusiastically by the old General Kuzmin Kavavaev: it was said afterwards that the whole party consisted of only the General, his son and myself.

Electioneering was going on everywhere non-stop, including the front, and came to be considered a sort of social outing, where appreciation of the speaker's oratorical achievement was of much more importance than the contents of his speech. No wonder it was so, because when the results of the election became public, it was clear that the overwhelming majority of voters, the peasants, had made up their minds as to who were to be their representatives. As a result, the Constituent Assembly contained more than a two-thirds majority of Social Revolutionaries—the peasant party *par excellence*. The rest were Social Democrats of various hues, with twelve Liberals sent by the two capitals, and one Monarchist, sent by the Old Believers of Nizhni Novgorod.

Meanwhile, and especially after the collapse of what was termed the "Kerensky" offensive on the Austrian front, things were rapidly deteriorating, not only in the army, but throughout Russia. The start of the agrarian revolution had the effect of

making soldiers uneasy, and not only at the front, but worse still, at the enormous depots, overcrowded with conscripts and reservists, which were scattered all over the country. These agglomerations interfered with everything—the land was affected by the lack of manpower, transport suffered through supplying their needs, as well as the needs of the front line, and their mood was a constant threat to all administrative agencies. As a result, towards the last weeks of summer, the whole course of life, which, at the beginning of the revolution, seemed to be hardly affected at all, got worse with amazing rapidity. Had it not been for that hope of something positive emerging from the Constituent Assembly, I believe that a complete breakdown, with its resulting chaos, would have been inevitable.

All this was felt at G.H.Q. just as much, if not more, than anywhere else, and, to be quite frank, a mood of apprehensive resignation had set in there by the end of September and, the front being quiet, the routine proceeded in somnolent apathy. In a similar mood the whole country listened to confused rumours of what was going on in Petrograd and, more important still, in the Petrograd Soviet.

As I said before, the final solution was still expected from the Constituent Assembly, but already the Soviets, both soldiers' and local, were the mouthpieces through which all hopes and criticisms were expressed. From the beginning these Soviets were, as I said before, controlled by the Social Revolutionaries, but now groups of the more extreme Social Democrats—the future Bolsheviks—were slowly but surely gaining influence. The Petrograd Soviet in particular had a quite exceptional position, because in addition to the important depots of reservists centred in and around the city, it represented the most active and politically conscious industrial workers. It closely watched over the government and its central apparatus, and formed a permanent political centre, ever ready for revolutionary action. What it all came to was that the cardinal law-



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making institution—the Constituent Assembly—had come into existence in a metropolis which was already ruled by a body entirely prepared to transform its critical attitude into direct interference at any given moment.

I could say now that the events which followed the overthrow of the Constituent Assembly by the Bolsheviks are too well known to be worth mentioning: I shall not do so, because I do not remember what happened myself, and I am quite certain that most of my contemporaries are in the same position if they do not look up the facts, and, after considerable research, form one of the many opinions which result from such efforts. Therefore all I can do is to describe such impressions that still linger in my memory about the taking over of the G.H.Q. by the new powers.

One morning, in late October, a train, manned by sailors from the cruiser *Palada*, arrived at Mohilev, under the command of Krilenko—the representative, and self-appointed C.-in-C., of the new régime. The then C.-in-C., Doukhonin, went to see him, and was murdered on this train. The exact circumstances of this action by a group of fanatic sailors was never explained, and I personally am convinced that it was completely unpremeditated, and must have left Krilenko in the same state as we all found ourselves—utterly shocked and bewildered.

As far as my particular office went, the only outward sign of any change was that when, at the end of the morning, we left for our midday meal, we found, in the hall of the building, a sailor mounting guard with a rifle and correctly saluting us all as we passed. He was a very young and perfectly disciplined rating, who wore a fur cap, with his ship's ribbon wound round it in a curious fashion. For my own charges, the foreigners, the advent of the Bolsheviks was the first indication of the possibility of a separate peace between Russia and Germany. Somewhere during that period I remember sitting at a table,

late in the evening, dictating to at least three Heads of Foreign Missions—I think it was the British, French and Rumanian, with some others in the background—a long telegram entirely made up out of my own head. It contained about five hundred words of reasoned advice to the Allies to take the initiative in allowing Russia to come to a separate peace with Germany. I know it was taken down verbatim by my listeners, who appeared to be convinced by my reasoning, and very keen to get it on the wires as soon as possible. What in the end happened to this telegram, whether it was ever sent, and if so, whether it reached the Allied G.H.Q. in the West, I, to this day, do not know. . . .

The rest of my service at our G.H.Q. can be summed up in a very few words. With my friends, Virouboff and Wrangel, I vegetated in a small house—Wrangel already deeply concerned with the organisation of the Volunteer Army. Volunteer in the sense that it was supposed to absorb the small percentage of armed peasantry who were prepared to stay in the ranks, and continue to fight the Germans and not rush back home immediately to solve the land question. In fact, it was an attempt to reproduce the British Volunteer Army of 1914, under, it is true, entirely different circumstances.

After the peace of Brest Litovsk, the whole Russian Army was demobilised; we were all given our reservist papers, and told to go home.

CHAPTER VI

THE REVOLUTION

H OME . . . but where was my home? To Sosnofka I had no intention of returning at that moment. I had had no news from there at all since some time during the autumn, my agent informed me that he had transferred his duties to the Executive Committee of the local village soviet. He left the place and disappeared from my ken, never to be heard of again. My flat in Petrograd had been closed and the furniture stored, but, in the sporadic trouble and street fighting that marked the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly and the advent of the Soviet Régime, the flat itself had been, by one side or the other, organised as a defensive position, resulting in irreparable damage to windows and doors, and making it uninhabitable in any case. I was, therefore, only too glad to accept gratefully the invitation of Igor Ilinsky an old friend of Virouboff's, a Moscow lawyer to become, together with one or two other Zemstvo friends, a boarder in his spacious flat situated in the Arbat, one of Moscow's best known residential districts.

I had never before lived in Moscow and did not know at all this most Russian of cities, left without a rival since the demise of Petrograd: a defect that was now speedily remedied. The Ilinskys were Moscow intellectuals of the deepest hue and intimate friends of the Leo Tolstoy circle, in all its various ramifications. Their flat was one of the innumerable hubs of intel-

lectual life and this implied ties not only with the professional, but also the stage and literary worlds. It was, in fact, the best possible point of vantage for me at that time.

Thus another period of waiting and watching events in idleness started, in which the chief problem soon became the necessity to make up one's mind on what to do next. This turn implied either choosing a side in the Civil War which was gradually involving the whole country, or remain out of it, as a neutral observer—an expression to which I am reduced for want of a better one: in a civil war, there is no such thing as neutrality, and all that happens is that eventually both the protagonists are apt to consider you a potential traitor, to be dealt with accordingly.

The general situation which developed through the late autumn and winter of that year was broadly as follows: the Soviet Government, having at its disposal most of the remaining cadres of the regular Army and Navy, held the two capitals and the whole of northern and central Russia, whereas the Ukraine, the south-eastern steppes, with the Cossack country and Siberia beyond were, at least nominally, under the sway of the Constituent Assembly, the scattered remains of which had reassembled in Samara. Its armed forces consisted of the Volunteer Army, including the Officer's Training Schools, most of the Cossacks and the Czech Divisions, which, in the process of evacuating themselves via Vladivostock to the Western Front, took temporary charge of the main Siberian railway line, and, thereby, of the whole of that vast sub-continent. As is well known, all these forces had the full support of the Allies, and formed the spearhead of the famous Cordon Sanitaire.

For those who had made up their minds that only arms could decide the conflict between the lawfully constituted Assembly and the usurping Soviet power, the choice was simple, and they lost no time in making their way south and east while the going was good, to where the forces of resistance

were gathering. Such were my friends from G.H.Q.—the part they took from the very beginning in the organisation of the Volunteer Army left them in all conscience with no other choice: as for myself, who never had anything to do with that side of their activities, I felt completely free from obligations towards the Volunteer Army. There was also this consideration: the Volunteer Army had been conceived as a force intended to fight, or at least to withstand, the external foe, so as to leave the conscript army free to return home and settle, in one way or another, the internal affairs of the country. The shift which put the external foe to second place, and made the Volunteer Army face inland—as it were admitting that civil war was the only solution—was by no means acceptable to everybody, even amongst the officers, or the middle class from which they came.

The difficulties of a clear choice of allegiance were, for quite a long time after the overthrow of the Provisional Government, increased by the fact that comparatively few believed that a fundamental and permanent change of régime had come about. A solution in a peaceful compromise between the right wing of the Social Revolutionaries—representing by far the largest part of the peasantry—and the Zemstvo, leading to the assumption of authority by the Constituent Assembly was not at all beyond the bounds of possibility.

It soon became evident what the general attitude of those of us who remained outside the fight would be. It was expressed at several informal meetings which assembled prominent provincial Zemstvo people either residing or visiting in Moscow at the time in quest of information. No rigid organisation of any kind was contemplated and, previous standing in local governments as our only link, each of us was to return to his home province and there, while in no way taking sides in the main conflict, try to keep local conditions under close observation. It was expected, also, that occasional visits to Moscow

would help this network of observers to keep in touch with each other.

The idea behind all this was very simple and, in retrospect, I must confess, rather naïve, though it sounded wise and statesmanlike enough at the time: our informal network of experienced old hands was to be ready to step in in the case of a breakdown of either one, or both, of the contending régimes. Should, on the other hand, a compromise between them achieve a relatively stable situation, we still could usefully return to public life. That one of the two sides and, as it happened, by far the most politically extreme, should soon establish itself, seemed during quite a long period, unthinkable.

In general agreement with the views sketched above, I made my way to Tambov, there to establish myself under the wing of Yuri Davidoff. With all his fellows, he had been obliged to resign his position as the provincial representative of the Provisional Government and was now living there as a civilian, completely unmolested, in his own house and surroundings. Received by him and my other local friends with open arms I was soon living in my own small flat—and immersed at last in what, for me, was my native atmosphere, busy taking stock of how the great change was shaping in the immediate vicinity of Sosnofka itself.

I enjoyed my change of venue immensely; after years of virtual exile, I was back amongst old friends and colleagues, and the complete change of atmosphere did not seem to have affected old-established personal relations at all. There was also the feeling of relief at having left Moscow, now the seat of the new central executive power with its irritating constant and tense foreboding and an undercurrent of anxious expectation of further catastrophic developments. Having come to port at last in Tambov, I had, for the first time since the March upheaval, the leisure to sort out my impressions and to lay out a firm course for myself for the near future at least.

I think it would be appropriate here to tear oneself away from the political aspects of life, and try to turn to the material side of day-to-day existence, as far as the towns were concerned, leaving for the present, the self sufficient peasantry to shift for themselves—as they did quite successfully, all through the Civil War. It is difficult at this distance in time to recall even the major events in their proper sequence, but this should not impair a description of the general background affecting the day-to-day life of everyone who was not a food producer himself.

The main factor in this sphere determining the future course of events was the gradual collapse of currency, and with it, of all negotiable securities. This started during the Provisional Government, and the final stage was reached quite early after its overthrow in October. From that moment and for a long time afterwards practically everybody, old and young, with the fair sex in triumphant, if not too glamorous, lead, would, *en masse*, betake themselves daily, to their respective "Petticoat Lanes" to take up their stands there during all the time left over from queuing at the foodshops. A colossal all-embracing black-market had come into being, trading in exchange or barter and exclusively for food and bare necessities of life, in every conceivable commodity from jewels and precious metals, works of art and books, clothes and materials, furniture and household goods down to every bit of rubbish lying about for years in any household. But need I to go on: the picture must be, by now, clear enough to every European—bar, perhaps, the inhabitants of these happy islands. The only thing I can claim for my own country, is the doubtful distinction of having started the whole process in the most spectacular fashion.

At the beginning this monstrous orgy was conducted quite openly, except, perhaps, for gold and precious metals; but only too soon the situation began rapidly to alter for the worse, in a

very ominous and dangerous sense. There were, especially amongst the demobilised soldiery, sufficient unscrupulous elements about to exploit an inexhaustible source of black market goods by scrounging or outright pilfering the vast army stores of every description all over the country. In small groups, or even largish bands, those elements, mostly armed, soon infected every city in the land, and were rapidly getting completely out of hand; the People's Militia, substituting for the old police force was, at the beginning not only very inefficient indeed, but, as often as not prepared to work hand in hand with the "bandits," as this section of the black-marketeers was called by the public.

With such an abnormal and highly dangerous situation rapidly threatening to get completely out of hand, the State inevitably had to take action, and did so in a characteristically drastic and wholesale manner.

This action taken by the authorities was the creation of the "Supreme Commission for the Prevention of Speculation, Black Marketeering and Counter Revolution", popularly known at first as the C.H.E.K.A., gradually to become the O.G.P.U., and N.K.V.D. and still alive to-day as M.V.D. Its activities have, unfortunately, become the yardstick by which everything going on inside the Iron Curtain is measured by those outside.

This agency was organised and given extraordinary powers, commensurate with the public danger it was intended to combat. Its chairman was, from the start, always a member of the Central Executive Committee of the ruling party; the other members ranking only a little below him in the Party's councils. The higher personnel, both of the Central Offices in Moscow and Petrograd, and its branches in all the administrative centres of the land, were recruited from party members of firmly established integrity and administrative capacity.—In fact everything was done to provide an extraordinary in-

vestigating authority to traduce, speedily and efficiently before the regular courts, social offenders and, but in far lesser degree, habitual criminals, and then only in so far as they were concerned with black-market offences. If, in the lower ranks, the servants of the Commission often proved to be much below standard—and especially during the early days with the black market in full and exuberant bloom the most unsavoury messes were rather the rule than the exception—such were dealt with from above in the most drastic, uncompromising and public fashion.

The Commission speedily produced results in no uncertain manner: a stream of offenders, of various degrees of importance, began to flow through every regular prison and house of detention, as well as the Cheka's own establishments, for which requisitioned blocks of offices and apartment houses were hurriedly adapted, sprouting all over the two capitals and the larger towns. These places were in no time filled to overflowing with a countless, but constantly changing, crowd of men, women, and even children, all connected, in one way or another, with the black-market. In fact, universal participation in these activities was met by no less universal counteraction, so much so that the popular saying current at the time, dividing the New Society into three classes: "those who had been, those who were and those who were due, in prison", was, on the face of it, completely justified.

But, almost from the very start, the crowd of black-marketeters was augmented, in ever increasing numbers, by another kind of offender, or rather, suspect. For these the appropriate little square on the prison file would be marked, not with the customary "speck" (speculator), but with the ominous letters "C-R"—counter-revolutionary . . . The inevitable had happened: the new régime had begun to react to possible challenge to its security from within by using in the political field, an organisation primarily built up to counteract the crippling

economic crisis, and this, with an ever-increasing vigour and efficiency.

As the course of this narrative will show, I came on several occasions in forcible contact with that side of the Cheka's activities, and this will give me the opportunity to describe the methods of its agents as they impressed me at the time. In leaving the subject for the present, all that I have to say here is that the impact of the Cheka on daily life left one with a feeling of complete uncertainty about the dividing line separating the law-abiding citizen from the transgressor in a maze of vaguely defined offences (ranging from high treason to breaking petty regulations, constantly revised and altered). The chief trouble was the impression of monumental inefficiency created in the minds of the public by the methods applied by the "ever watchful eye" of the State—a term which was transferred from the old régime's secret police to the Cheka.

It became obvious to everyone that a task had been assumed which would tax the abilities of even the most highly trained personnel, and indeed became insurmountable given the inextricable confusion between purely economic and counter-revolutionary offences. The comparatively few flagrant cases could have been efficiently dealt with by other and more normal means.

During the few months of my leisurely and peaceful stay in Tambov I found, that the society of the town had changed little from pre-war days. It was composed, as was the case all over Russia, of medium and small landowners, who were not able to live exclusively on their income from the land, and had to supplement it by permanent jobs such as magistrates, lawyers and doctors, government or, more often *Zemstvo*, officials. Managing their landed property through agents or bailiffs, most of the year they lived in their permanent residences in

the provincial centres, where they formed a compact and well defined community—in manner and custom an exact reproduction of the *monde* of the two capitals, if a shade less *grand*.

Neither rich nor poor, culturally they could quite compete with their counterparts in Western Europe: in many ways they had, for me at least, the marked advantage of being much more independent in thought and outlook, free and easy in behaviour and, best of all, hardly subdivided by snobbery into small watertight compartments and cliques. By now everybody was back from the wars, and a more or less satisfactory return to normal was achieved, at least as far as domestic life was concerned, as most of their jobs were still functioning and paid for, in one way or another. Landed property had, of course, as in my case in Sosnofka, passed into the hands of the local Soviets, but in nearly all cases the personal relationships between the old and the new owners were so good that material supplies were amply provided by the latter and included, sometimes, such items as carriage horses, milking cows and livestock generally—all this on a voluntary and gratuitous basis. Most of these landowners, and especially those whose estates were within twenty to thirty miles from Tambov, continued to visit them and stay for quite long periods *en villagiature*.

On the whole both sides in the conflict, i.e. the cruel oppressors—as official terminology had it—and the helpless oppressed, kept in constant and usually amiable touch, nursing the impression that the whole rural community was suffering under the impact of something incomprehensible descending on them from the big towns. The feeling of unease in the mutual relationship between the two sides, was characteristically mitigated by a symbolic formula, according to which it was assumed that the estates were not expropriated for good, but pending a final decision, rented by the communities at an evaluation, it is true, nowhere near the prices current before the break up.

Very soon after my arrival in Tambov I received a totally unexpected visit from one of my foremen, a Sosnofka householder himself, who arrived one afternoon at my flat with a full cartload of rural produce. He told me that the news of my whereabouts having percolated to Sosnofka on the last market day, he had lost no time in making up the cartload to come and see me—a distance of about forty miles by road—to find out, as he termed it, what the whole show was about. He also brought me an unofficial message from the chairman of our local soviet—a very substantial citizen, by the way—to express that body's anxiety about my continued silence, and its best wishes for the future. An interminable conversation, lasting nearly all through the night followed,—it is amazing how much vodka can be got rid of on such an occasion—by no means confined to Sosnofka, but taking in the whole of the revolution, with the wars, the Allies in the west, and in fact, the whole wide world thrown in for good measure.

After this visit hardly a week passed without somebody from Sosnofka calling on me, including, after a time, even some of the influential members of the rural soviet. Not the chairman himself, it is true, but still people who were able to reflect the life of the countryside at the time. They passed vague hints that there was a feeling abroad of the need to re-absorb, in one way or another, myself and the likes of me into the life and activities of the rural community, provided always that we were prepared to accept the *status quo* of virtual expropriation of the land as final and irrevocable under any circumstances.

All these conversations, in which my intercourse with the the peasantry was expressed, were impregnated—and here I am quite prepared to accept the accusation of a romantic approach—with a sort of epic quality, dating them, in spite of modern terminology, far beyond in time even of the serfdom days. One was, inadvertently, brought back to the “times of

trouble" when it was the country squire who shaped, at the head of the peasantry, the future of their native land.

I was by no means alone in gathering such an impression from these talks, and it did not take long for myself and quite a number of my friends to come to the conclusion that the peasantry was not only quite prepared, but even rather anxious, to establish a *modus vivendi*, by which the inclusion of the landowners in their life could be one of the determining factors for the establishment of a lasting compromise between the onslaught of western Marxist socialism and the native social revolutionary brand.

Such prospects, though only expressed in vague hints and speculations, were, nevertheless, enough to undermine my confidence in the "sitting on the fence" policy adopted by my Zemstvo friends and myself in Moscow. I began to realise that the time had come to try and identify myself as clearly as possible with a peasant interest, and to do so by making my way to Sosnofka to live there in such conditions as might present themselves. As I saw things at the time, such a decision involved a definite taking of sides, and would be, consequently, in contradiction with the sense of our agreement—which was to keep absolutely neutral and inactive. I therefore felt it my duty to disassociate myself from the agreement, and to inform the other partners of my attitude and decision.

There was another reason that prompted me: on several occasions young men had appeared at my flat, with letters of introduction from one or another of my Moscow friends. I was requested to give temporary shelter to these young men, for whom apparently "special circumstances" made it undesirable to register locally. In some cases I was also to introduce the travellers, as unobtrusively as possible, to certain local people. I did as asked, and after a few days stay with me those silent and furtive visitors, with Officer's Training School written all over their appearance and manner, disappeared again, bound for an

unknown destination. With the air thick with rumours about its existence, only one explanation fitted their case: they were liaison agents of a vast underground organisation of demobilised mostly war-time subalterns and cadets, which was building itself up all over the country as a fifth column on behalf of the Volunteer Army. From the beginning vague and rather diffuse, with a membership ranging in political allegiance from monarchist to left-wing Social Revolutionaries, it soon became the Cheka's main target, especially when recurrent terrorist acts against individuals, or even groups, of members of the ruling party were traced, or at least ascribed, to them. To choose my flat as a temporary refuge for people proceeding all over the place on decidedly unlawful occasions—in the view of the “ever watchful eye”—was, in itself, a complete and evident breach of our agreement to keep out of anything with political implications. It would, if suspected only, effectively scotch for good and all my plans for retirement to Sosnofka.

There was only one solution possible for this complicated situation—I had to go to Moscow myself, contact my friends and make my position clear, prepared eventually for a complete break with them, as far, at least, as the original agreement went. And so to Moscow I departed for a short visit, which was, quite unexpectedly, to be extended to much longer by my first personal encounter with the Cheka, which, however, proved to be of a rather farcical nature.

That is not to say that I had been left without the attention of our provincial branch, but in Tambov the public generally speaking paid little attention to, and had, at least in those early days, even less respect for its representatives, and that for a good reason. Imagine the kind of feelings such well-known and popular characters as an elderly teller of the local branch of one of the big banks, the repairs foreman of a central depot of agricultural machinery, with perhaps a very junior partner of an old-established firm of solicitors thrown in, would inspire

in the members of the County Club of an average county town in England. Against such a background this trio, as the chief agents of a revolutionary Special Branch, would have to exercise, under constant pressure from above, their function of controlling the black-market and supervision of subversive elements. As a result mutual goodwill was the keynote and the rule rather than the exception during the various drives in which our provincial Cheka indulged, from time to time, in public places such as markets, railway stations, theatres and clubs, and also a specially selected series of private homes. A personal telephone call would always settle any difficulties arising with the lower personnel in the course of these proceedings.

To give an example: early one evening a young man, smartly dressed in a sort of semi-military garb, nearly universal in those days, appeared at my flat, and standing respectfully to attention proffered a paper, which proved to be a search warrant. He explained that he was supposed to be looking for hoarded gold, platinum and other precious metals, and asked my leave to proceed with his search. It was a perfunctory affair—just a casual inspection of all the rooms and the opening of a few drawers and cupboards: nothing was discovered except a certain amount of tableware, which was duly passed as not excessive, in his opinion, for a man of my standing in the community. A clean bill in writing was obtained and the official side of the visit was over. Invited to share a snack with a glass of vodka he accepted with pleasure and after a very friendly conversation, mostly about his experiences in the war—he proved to be a sergeant of a crack cavalry regiment—we parted best of friends. He too, gave me a telephone number, by which I could reach him in case of future difficulty with any of his kind.

But to return to my visit to Moscow. I duly reached the capital, after a slow and cumbersome journey, some time in

early March, 1918, and following a standing invitation, appeared at the house of V. F. Kokoschkin, a leading Moscow Zemstvo man and brother of a distinguished member of the Duma; his wife, who came from a well-known family of Tambov landowners, had been a great friend of mine for a long time past. Their house was a perfect example of the small town residences of the provincial nobility that sprang up all over the Arbat after the great fire of the Napoleonic invasion.

A sprawling, one-storied timber construction, painted yellow and white, with a traditional Empire front and porch surrounded by a largish garden which separated it on all sides from its similar neighbours, it was typical of the district which clustered round a small open space, known, oddly enough, as "the Dog's Square". Filled with an astounding number of rooms of all sizes and configurations, it was a place of incredible charm to live in, which made it always difficult to tear oneself away and delightful to return to for its own sake.

My host himself was away at the time, sticking around his property in one of the districts of the Moscow province, as a sort of precautionary measure, to tell the truth, against excessive attention from "you know who": this was to me my first intimation that the easy times prevailing during my first stay in Moscow were receding markedly and relentlessly. His wife Vera, a typical example of that admirable breed of arch priestesses of the black-market, who, carrying its banner high, was able to manage the burdens of her household with indomitable courage, spirit, charm and cheerfulness. This consisted of a boy of 17, in his last year at the High School, two small girls and an ancient invalid aunt, with one and a half old and decrepit family retainers as the only so-called help.

I settled in ease and greatest comfort, soon made my contacts and, to my great relief, found that most of my friends shared my views, at least in so far as to the abortiveness of our original attitude, and were quite prepared to declare our connection,

vague as it was, null and void from that time onwards. How far, or if at all, any of them were in any way in touch with other organisations I did not try to find out, and, in fact, did not discover till much later.

Having, in about ten days, settled my own affairs to my complete satisfaction I was, nevertheless, loth to tear myself away from the charming and oh-so-comfortable surroundings in which I was living, the more so as I had occasion to meet quite a number of interesting people, some old acquaintances and friends and some quite new to me. There was, for instance, the young Count Mouraviev, who, broadly shared my outlook on current affairs, but had chosen a different way of keeping abreast of them. He managed to get into contact with some of the most important personalities of the régime, culminating in several private talks with Trotski himself. It was, I believe, on these occasions that they together concocted the term of *poputchik* (now so well known in English as "fellow traveller"), to denote a person who, while under no circumstances prepared to accept the ultimate tenets of the Bolshevik creed, would nevertheless, be admitted by the present régime to exercise various functions in the public service.

It was Mouraviev who introduced me to the philosopher Berdyaev and his circle, who were at that time, still residing in Moscow. I was privileged to participate, on several occasions, at the symposiums which were held at Berdyaev's house and attended each time by ten or twelve guests, all of them of the highest mental and spiritual achievement. These visits were in every way a most interesting experience, but I must confess that my personal contribution to these abstract discussions was for a good reason, practically non-existent.

Imagine a spacious dining-room and a long table, lit by an overhead lamp, with the guests lining both sides: at one end Mme. Berdyaev, officiating over the inevitable samovar and at the other Berdyaev himself, first as host and later as chairman

of the proceedings. After a little while spent in general conversation and the introduction of newcomers to the circle, Berdyaev, having tersely summed up the discussions of the previous meetings, proposed a thesis arising out of this introductory appreciation. The main themes and preoccupations of the circle were the future of the Orthodox Church, its organic spiritual welfare and continuity as the mainstay of the religious life of the country. Yet the circle, while perfectly conscious of an active anti-religious onslaught by the new régime, did not allow current events in that sphere to become the subject of their attention. The discourse was invariably kept on the highest and most abstract theological and philosophical level.

I am under the impression that it was the symposium of Berdyaev's circle which had a profound and lasting influence on the spiritual life, not only of the Russian patriarchate, but also on the Orthodox Theological Academy that in due course came into being in France. As far as I myself was concerned I can only say that all that I heard, during my short connection with this circle, was more than enough to convince me that a church which could produce such a constructive elevation of theological thought would forever hold its own against any storm it would be its fate to endure.

These reminiscences which have brought back to me the contacts I had, in those days, with Berdyaev and the members of his circle make me aware that they were about the only occasions during which the fate of the Church, in revolutionary Russia, obtruded itself on my attention—it is for this reason that I feel compelled to abandon this vast subject now, in spite, or better because, of its importance: on the surface, at least, the mass of the population seemed to take little heed of the constant action by the authorities against the institutions of the church and its servants. The reason was, I think, that these actions were interpreted primarily as expressions of anti-clericalism, to which the Russian has been at all times very

prone: especially so since the marked subservience of the clergy, high and low, to the State, dating back to the abolition of the Patriarchy by Peter the Great.

I am much tempted to ascribe to this apparent indifference, which favoured on the surface the policies of the new régime, the attributes of a screen behind which the spiritual life of the Church not only went on unabashed, but grew and was intensified by the dangers with which the atheist Marxist creed threatened it.

This passive and essentially non-militant attitude chosen by the Orthodox Church, threading its path during the most turbulent period of the revolution, characterises for me, perhaps more forcibly than ever before, the insurmountable gulf that separates the Eastern side of the Orthodox Catholic faith from the Western under the sway of the Bishop of Rome.

But only too soon the interesting and stimulating tenour of my visit to Moscow was interrupted and brought to an end: we had all, one evening, gone to bed, when, soon after midnight, three young men appeared at the door of our house and asked Vera, who answered the door, if a Fedya Kokoschkin was living there. The answer being in the affirmative they produced a warrant for his arrest and search of his living quarters and belongings—all very formal and correct. And so were the young men—in dress and turn-out the exact counterparts of my friend of the Tambov search, except that they all were armed with service revolvers, conspicuously carried in a holster on their belts.

Led by Vera, strongly vocal in her remonstrations, they entered the house and were taken to the boy's room, where he was in bed fast asleep. By that time I, in my adjacent room, had taken notice of something unusual afoot, and donning a dressing-gown joined the company to assist my hostess in the proceedings, as far as I could. Fedya started to dress, and Vera to ask the senior agent about the cause of his arrest, when the

boy, before the agent could reply, surprised and also alarmed his mother and myself by saying that he thought he knew what the trouble might be. Upon which the agent cheerfully proclaimed that that was all to the good, and the matter, no doubt, would be cleared up at headquarters in no time at all. A more amiable atmosphere thus successfully established, the search of Fedya's room—a rather thorough operation—was taken in hand, which, however, yielded no results. Fedya himself, meanwhile, was putting a few things together and his mother, her courageous self again, was bustling about in the kitchen assembling the “tea-kettle” and glass, together with tea, sugar and some food—according to a routine already firmly established for similar occasions and well known to everybody. By that time Fedya's two sisters, girls of thirteen and eleven respectively, had appeared on the scene in their dressing-gowns and pigtails. They were immediately all over the two junior agents, going so far as to assist them in their search or at least, tidying up after them. In fact a very lively scene ensued, in which the only gloomy note was provided by a chorus of lugubrious mutterings and moans from the one and a half ancient retainers, leaning in the background against door-posts in complete immobility and uselessness.

Meanwhile I, keeping to the rôle of an impartial observer, suddenly became aware of the fact that the senior agent was eyeing me repeatedly with ever-growing attention, which ended in his asking me who I was and what I was doing in the house. On being informed I was a friend from Tambov on a short visit to Moscow, he asked for my papers, and having checked the information obtained from them and ascertained the fact that I was a demobilised reserve officer, scratching his head, after a few moments of doubtful reflection said: “You had better come along too.”

On my lively protests and demands for a proper warrant, he produced Fedya's and pointed out to me a clause, in very small

print, which made it effective also for "other suspect elements, if found on the premises". Seeing that there was nothing for it but to obey, I went to my room, accompanied by my captors' assurances that a drive on a warm night would do me no harm and that everything, as usual, would be cleared up in no time, etc., etc., to make up—for the first time—the customary overnight case, while Vera got busy unearthing a second 'tea-kettle' with accessories, this time for my use.

In due course away we went, the five of us all together in an open car, in lieu of a Black Maria, to what our escorts called "The Central Sorting Depot". It was accommodated, about ten minutes drive away, in the requisitioned offices of an insurance company, in the Lubianka—one of the busiest thoroughfares of the business district of Moscow. On arrival we found ourselves in a sort of reception hall, where quite a number of people were milling about to no apparent purpose. It was a fairly large room, furnished down one side with a long counter and receptionists behind it. Guided towards it we here filled up certain forms, together with the agents responsible for us, and after five minutes of this were duly registered as prisoners and left to join the milling crowd, and told to await further instructions.

I observed that one side of the room was occupied by a row of small clapboard compartments, obviously temporary and recently put in, where from behind closed doors one could hear arguments conducted very loudly and in the roughest possible language, by several parties simultaneously, arguing about various most dastardly crimes. At one moment one of the doors opened and from it emerged rather swiftly—perhaps propelled by a kick—a nondescript citizen, who merged into the crowd muttering curses and glaring fiercely at everybody around. Behind the door, left open for a few moments, two men—one obviously an agent, the other one more nondescript—were revealed, facing each other across a small table

with a revolver in the middle, flinging at each other, at the top of their voices in the coarsest language, a stream of mutual accusations and vilifications. A person of respectable appearance, standing next to me, and probably noting the expression of disturbed amazement on my face, passed to me, in the quiet manner of an old hand, the rather cryptical remark: "Bandits—preliminary questioning—*nothing to do with us . . .*"

As I was able to discover for myself later, he was quite right. In all places of detention used by the Cheka a very firm line of demarcation was always drawn, and that both in treatment and accommodation, between the habitual criminal elements termed "bandits", and what may be called dilettanti in that sphere, and C.Rs.—counter revolutionaries—both the last categories known universally as "politicals". There were a few border-line cases, of course, and they gave trouble to both jailers and prisoners: but in practice "politicals" and "bandits" were kept rigidly separate, and in regular prisons had no contact at all.

After a time Fedya and I were taken to a very large hall, filled with an amazing mixture of men and women—some of the last with babies and small children—of every imaginable age and walk of life. Some were asleep or lying down on the wooden pallets established all along the walls and in the middle of the room, some having tea out of the inevitable "kettle", and some walking about engaged in desultory conversation, all with an air of subdued, but not anxious, resignation. As we made our way to find a vacant place for ourselves, excited calls from a group in one of the dark corners of the room drew us there, and as we joined them at last the cause of our troubles became clear: the group consisted of all except one of Fedya's ten or twelve classmates and an elderly gentleman, a certain Prince Galitzine, the headmaster of another secondary school, who had been arrested by mistake in lieu of another classmate of Fedya's, of the same surname and title. (He was

released a few days later, with apologies, and his namesake escaped arrest altogether).

What transpired, after the rather effusive greetings were over, was this: one of the boys, the one who was not with us (as we discovered later, he was kept in solitary confinement till the end of the affair) had decided entirely on his own to found a secret society consisting exclusively of his class in the High School, with the declared object of helping in the organisation of an armed rising against the régime, expected in the near future. This he did without any prompting from, or—far more important—affiliation to, any other organisation.

The members were supposed to make a detailed reconnaissance of their respective districts, noting the location and describing, in special notebooks, such places as balconies suitable for machine gun nests, strong buildings for H.Q.s and assemblies of reserves, cross roads adaptable for barricades, etc., etc., which would be of help to insurgents in street fighting. All the rules of the game were carefully laid down and transcribed under the covers of the said notebooks: the group called themselves some such name as "The White Falcons" and had the senior Falcon as their leader. How the authorities got wind of this never became known—the boys all swore they had never committed any indiscretion whatsoever—but the Cheka's action was energetic and conclusive enough. The rest of this miserable affair into which I had been landed can be told in a very few words: the evening after our arrest we were transferred to the Butirsky jail, to be individually questioned there about three days later, and finally sent home after a week's detention altogether.

We had nothing to complain of in the way of treatment except the inevitable discomforts of an overcrowded prison, and were better fed than outside, by means of enormous food parcels sent in by anxious parents and, in my case, dear Vera. All that happened in the end to the boys was that they were

severely reprimanded and cautioned and even the senior Falcon was only kept an extra fortnight in solitary, and not allowed to take his finals that spring.

Such a very mild outcome must I think, be ascribed to the efforts of the father of one of the boys, who was an influential Social Revolutionary, of old-established underground reputation, and now a supporter of the régime; though not a member of the ruling party, he had many close friends among the leading personalities.

In my case the affair had a rather interesting sequel: after Fedya and I had been arrested, Vera had mobilised a certain couple: the man and his wife both psychiatrists in charge of a private mental home a few miles outside of Moscow. They had many valuable connections amongst the ruling few, of whom a number of all ranks had been under their care, with nervous breakdowns and allied disorders. I met this couple at Vera's after my release, and they told me that one of their contacts, a young investigating agent on the higher levels of the Cheka, who had been approached on my behalf, had expressed a wish to meet me privately and to have a talk to give me, as he put it: "some friendly advice".

I accepted the summons—to a command performance, if ever there was one—and went to stay as a guest at the mental home over the week-end to meet him.

I spent a whole day with that young man—we were the only visitors on that occasion, and had several very long talks with him, sitting on the edge of a small copse, overlooking from the high bank of the Moskva river, the whole town spread below us. About thirty, he was an extremely well-mannered, quiet and good-looking creature, in whom only the expression of his eyes, from time to time, revealed the intensity of his feelings. The son of a village schoolmaster in one of the central provinces, he was a graduate of the Law Faculty of Moscow University and had been a lawyer by pro-

fession before the war, in which he fought as a reserve subaltern not without distinction, having been wounded twice. As most men of his antecedents he had always been politically inclined towards the Social Revolutionaries—in his case its left wing—but had never been a regular party member or connected with underground activities before the Revolution. During the war, he had gone over to the Bolshevik wing of the Social Democrats, and became a party member just before the outbreak of the Revolution.

From the very first after our mutual awareness of the peasantry, and all they stood for, became apparent, our talks embraced, very thoroughly indeed, our attitudes towards the past, the present and the future. It was as if a member of the outgoing team was rendering account of the past and the reasons that brought the country to its present state of chaos, to one of the incoming team, who, in his turn, was trying to evaluate and clarify the means of getting out of it—that chaos was upon us was admitted by us both in complete agreement.

On the whole, he felt in sympathy with my plan to go back to the land, because an ultimate compromise was, for him too, an urgent and unavoidable necessity. But he was rather doubtful about the outcome of such a venture on the curious grounds that a man in my position, not a peasant and conspicuously placed, would be open to attack from all sides. He was one of the first to point out to me how much the gradually increasing White pressure, especially as supported from abroad, was hampering all moves that by now had been made, and were still going on, in the direction of compromise.

He hated his present job—a feeling he shared with a number of his comrades and told me that the chief reason that made him hold on to it was to prevent undesirable elements from getting into the Cheka—which, unfortunately, was not without its attractions for them. He was a strange young man and, though entirely honest in his convictions and conscientious

in his work, was unsure of himself and torn by the unavoidable contradictions between his social revolutionary past and his Bolshevik present: it was perhaps lucky for him that he was killed on the southern front later in the Civil War.

Meanwhile we parted with genuinely friendly feelings towards each other, which a short while later he was able to prove to me.

In the way of advice he had none to offer, saying that men of my disposition had nothing to fear from his institution, but begged me, for my own sake, to stay away from Moscow as much as possible, saying that in the chaos and nervous tension prevailing there all kinds of unpleasantness could happen—as my recent affair had proved only too eloquently.

Having spent the time left over from our talks in competing for the favours of one of the most beautiful and fascinating prima ballerinas of the Bolshoi Theatre, at the time a convalescent patient in the home, we went back to town together—he to return to his duties and I to pack my bag, take leave from my hostess and return to Tambov, where I arrived safely about three days later.

SOSNOFKA AGAIN

I come now to the few months when, during the summer of that year, I tried to substantiate the great plan of my return to Sosnofka and thereby to the land. At the present time, my trouble is that my recollections of that period are rather dim and only certain highlights stand out and those of events and situations of a somewhat trivial nature, as compared, at least, to the great expectations attached by me to this venture. It proved a dismal failure for many reasons, all linked up in a curious

non sequitur—but I shall do better here if I let the facts speak for themselves.

It all started in the most impressive fashion: a few weeks after my return to Tambov, Vassilly, the keeper, arrived with the usual load of produce, but this time bearing a message addressed to me by the Chairman of the Rural District Soviet, including not only Sosnofka, but about five other large villages and a number of hamlets in the neighbourhood. As an official administrative unit this agglomeration of places had never existed before and was one of those extempore improvisations with which rural life, in those days, abounded.

The message, couched in solemn and rather archaic language, informed me that by a unanimous decision of the representatives of the several soviets of the district, I was: firstly, invited to come to Sosnofka to take up my abode in the house as the tenant of the local soviet, included in the *Kniasbnaya* (Prince's) side of the community, and receive two shares of land—one for myself and one for my mother, as sole representatives of the household since the regretted death of my father and brother. Secondly: that I was unanimously elected as People's Justice for the district, my installation in this office to be deferred pending confirmation from the Provincial Soviet. There was more to it, about a horse and livestock to be allotted to me and other similar details—the whole duly signed by all the members of the Executive Committee.

I was delighted and at the same time dismayed by the whole fantastic concoction and, to tell the truth, at first rather suspicious of it, but Vassilly assured me that he himself was present when the resolution was carried and that there was no doubt at all that everything was quite genuine and above-board in every respect. So far so good—but the feeling of doubt and dismay persisted: what, for instance, was the exact position of a tenant of the local soviet in the house? And what kind of magistrate was an elected "People's Justice"?—a position which seemed to

have been invented specially for me, as it was never heard of either before or since anywhere in the land. But whatever the answer to these queries might be, one thing stood out as clear as daylight: the whole procedure put me, with a vengeance, into that eminently conspicuous position which was against both my judgment and instinctive feelings and against the dangers of which my Cheka friend had warned me.

But, I decided, there was nothing for it but to go—here, for once, the saying of *noblesse oblige* acquired some sense in harmony with the realities of life.

As the only precaution against unexpected local developments and, on the other hand, to have time to recover from the impact of this startling news, I arranged for some delay by first sending Vassilly back alone, with a message of my own, accepting gratefully all the rural soviet's proposals, and promising to make my appearance in a few weeks, the time necessary to take care of my affairs in Tambov.

When, in the middle of June, 1918, I drove up one morning to the houses—I had driven overland and overnight, in the cart with Vassilly, and all my belongings—this is what I found: there they stood, our two houses, all complete, just as if nothing had happened, with the drives, the garden, the shrubberies and the trees around the house the same as always—just a little untidy, but not very noticeably so, and with even some perennial flowers and roses in their beds in bloom. It is true, of course, that not more than two years had passed since everything had been properly attended to. The outbuildings, kitchen, ice house, and laundry house down by the pond were all in the same state of good repair and complete tidiness: but there was not a soul about anywhere.

I was received by a married couple—new people imported during the war from Petrograd as caretakers, to take the place of Alexander Stepanovich Sboiloff, who mercifully had died towards the end of it. The big surprise came when I entered the

houses. There were all the rooms, clean, tidy, no litter and hardly any dust—but empty of all furniture, carpets and curtains. At the same time the pictures were there on the walls, the whole library, clocks, vases, even small trifles on the mantelpieces and a collection of letters, which was my father and mother's correspondence through their lives—all these were intact and in their accustomed places, and not only in the reception rooms, but all over both houses. They were a strange sight and I had a sort of uncanny feeling of discovering them for the first time, although I knew perfectly well that most had been in their places since I was born.

What had happened, as far as I could discover, was that when, early under the Soviet régime, the arable together with the livestock, and agricultural implements, were divided amongst the individual householders of Sosnofka, the furnishings of all the living-quarters were included, amongst them those of the owners' houses. Though this was of doubtful legality, even from the Soviet régime's point of view, by that time it was an accomplished fact such as had happened in various ways throughout Russia. But who was behind the decision to preserve objects of artistic or literary value and, what is more, made the new owners accept and implement it, that I was never able to discover—all I was told was that those articles were now supposed to be national property and, as such, had to be preserved to await further disposition by experts from above.

To anticipate, I would like to say here that whoever did it succeeded perfectly—all that was preserved in Sosnofka is now in various local museums, mostly the one at our district town, Morshansk. My parents' letters went even further, to the Central Archives of Historical Research in Moscow and I, much later, had an offer to collect them from there. I never did so because I agreed that they were of historical importance and as such had found their rightful place.

Awaiting my return, two rooms—in fact my old bed and

sitting-room in the White House—had been refurnished with the very pieces that had always been there. In addition a table or two and some chairs were put into the hall to serve as a dining-room, also some pots and pans and a samovar to be used on the small range next to the empty gun-room. (My two 12-bore Holland guns had been buried by Vassilly the keeper under his house in the village—and, for all I know, might still be there.) The bathroom next to my bedroom was in complete order, with even fuel provided for the boiler, and, as the main water supply of the estate was still being kept going for the benefit of a number of our old staff, still occupying their quarters, my routine of personal cleanliness was one of the things that was immensely improved during my stay at Sosnofka as compared to recent, and even not so recent, times. Looked after by the married couple, who provided me with excellent food and service, it did not take me long to settle down in perfect comfort, on the material side of existence at least.

On every other side, it was not so—very far from it: through all my stay I was virtually alone, as if suspended in a sort of vacuum, where the rumblings of the outside world only faintly reached me. I pottered about in the garden and went for occasional walks through the grounds, but not once did I go over the farms or any other parts of the estate. This was motivated, in part at least, by the conscious desire not to give the impression, that I was in any way expecting to resume control—and indeed I myself was not interested at all any more in the estate, or any part of it. Even when our forester, a young man very keen on his profession, came to see me and abounded in the tale of recent successes and failures in his domain, by now incorporated in the State Forests, I surprised him by a complete lack of interest in a sphere in which he was accustomed, of old, to see me share his enthusiasms.

The village kept aloof and left me entirely alone: this applied

not only to older influential groups, but also the newcomers in village politics, who by now held nearly all the key positions in the rural soviets—of these Sosnofka alone had several, being still divided into the traditional “halves” obtaining before the revolution. The few people who came to see me were mostly concerned in eliciting my views on the situation, and though purporting to be very optimistic about my future amongst them were, I was sure, trying, not without success, to keep their real hopes and expectations concealed from me. I was, I dare say, producing exactly the same impression on them—in fact both sides were determined not to compromise themselves definitely in any way before my confirmation as People’s Justice came through from the Provincial Soviet.

And so the interminable days dragged on through that beautiful summer, with the promise of an outstanding harvest ripening fast, with nothing that met the eye or ear over the vast rolling plain of field and forest giving the slightest hint of the great change that had come about.

This period of enforced complete idleness, fraught with an intolerable and ever-growing internal tension, stands out for me as the most nerve racking time I have experienced in my life.

It came to its conclusion, one day in the late summer, in the most abrupt and final fashion.

Vassilly the keeper was constantly hanging about, making himself helpful in various ways, without, however, officially resuming his service. Through him current news and rumours percolated to me. He had it, one day, that a number of provincial soviet emissaries were said to be about; they were supposed to be trying to overcome the general reluctance of the peasantry to part with their food supplies. Apparently the food shortage in the capitals and towns generally was getting more and more acute and even army stores were getting low, and they were trying to persuade the local soviets to become

more active in that matter. The status of these emissaries was not clearly defined: it was known that they had the right to call extraordinary sessions of the village and canton soviets, but, said Vassilly, there must be more to it; because as rumour had it, some places had passed unanimous resolutions in such flagrant contradiction with their professed sentiments, that some compulsion must have been at work.

"There is," continued Vassilly, "that chap Rogatka, who goes about with two females of his. Nobody knows where he hails from, he behaves like a clown at the meetings and waves about a lot of papers—I am sure it is what is in those papers that makes people do as he wants . . . He is now at Lamki and they say he is due here any day now." All this sounded ominous enough and so it proved to be.

The very next market day—they held them on Wednesdays in Sosnofka—I received a summons to appear at an extraordinary joint meeting of all the householders and the members of the cantonal soviet, to be held at the tea-rooms in the middle of the market place. I walked all the length of the "Princes" half, a distance of about two miles, with nobody paying the slightest attention to me, and on arrival made my way up a very crowded staircase to the second floor of the establishment. There, in the large tea-room, the meeting numbering about three hundred had already started. I was shown to a seat, in front of the low platform where, behind a table, the executive of the cantonal and village soviets were assembled.

A small pale creature, with a thin, straggling red beard, was holding the floor, just coming to the end of his opening speech. This proved to be Rogatka himself and he was indeed waving a roll of papers in his hand. He spoke in a squeaky voice accompanied by a variety of clumsy, rather ridiculous, gestures and postures, which forcibly reminded me of the terms Vassilly had used in describing him. The two "females" were also there, sitting on a bench just below him—one young, dark, pretty

and quite composed, the other, an old ugly witch, smoking nervously one cigarette after another and glaring ferociously and suspiciously at the assembly in front of her.

My presence was noticed by the chair and Rogatka, after a whispered conversation with the chairman, got on his feet again and started introducing my case by explaining that, in the views of the Central Government, the presence of previous owners, in the villages where their estates lay, was undesirable. He then went on, using some of the stock propaganda scurrilities like "blood-sucking slave owners and exploiters of the poor down-trodden peasantry," when he was suddenly cut short by the chairman of the Kendorsky soviet, who was sitting next to the chairman of the meeting. Having silenced Rogatka by flinging "shut up" at him, this man, whom I knew by sight but had never met, said, addressing me personally: "Constantine Alexandrovich, it's no use—we ourselves have called you back here and still want you with us, but you see for yourself that you must leave us for the time being . . . We never had any quarrel with you, or your fathers either, and we thank you for past times and wish you good speed in God's Name. When the time comes we are sure to find you and call you back."

All this was listened to by the meeting in utter silence, and when he finished a sort of sigh of relief went up followed by a few subdued murmurings of consent. I then got up and in a few, I hope, well-chosen and dignified words explained that I was completely aware of the situation, would certainly leave Sosnofka and expressed, on behalf of my family and myself, our thanks for the past and my best wishes for the future, to Sosnofka as a whole and the Kendorskaya half especially. I then bowed from the waist, left, right and centre, to which the audience responded, scrambling to their feet in a rather disorderly fashion and interfering with each other tried to bow back, after which I made my way out of the building and home.

The quality of the performance which we all, principals and accessories, gave on that morning, once and for all confirmed me in the opinion that the art of the stage would always be in very good hands in my old country.

Arriving home I had a pleasant surprise: one of Yuri Davidoff's sisters-in-law, the widow of one of his brothers, had just arrived in Sosnofka on her way to Moscow and had called with news which was not only very pleasant to me, but solved in a most satisfactory way my present difficulties. The Davidoff family estate—Kulevatovo by name—dated back to the eighteenth century and had the same origins as ours: it was situated about ten miles east of us on the banks of the same river, Chelnovaya, just where it joined the Zna, on its course from Tambov to Morshansk. The property had been so large in olden days that it came right up to our borders, but in the course of time this outlying part had been sold to Veriatino, a village half-way between our two places. What was left—still of the size of the Sosnofka estate—was the joint property of four surviving brothers of whom Yuri Davidoff was the second. The youngest, Ilya, managed the joint property and lived there permanently with his family. The eldest, Basil, divided his time between running his wife's estate in one of the central provinces near Moscow, and visits abroad: the third, Alexander, another close friend and contemporary of mine, was a magistrate and before the revolution had been serving as Assistant Public Prosecutor in one of the Assize Courts of the Moscow Circuit. Now he had joined Ilya at Kulevatovo with his wife and two children.

The Davidoffs—of whom several branches were established in various parts of Russia—were a very well known family,

belonging to that provincial nobility which, from old, was the backbone of the administration, the judiciary and the local government of the land, and that both before and, even more so, after the Zemstvo Reforms of Alexander II. It has to be noted that few Davidoffs took up arms as a career and if they did, mostly retired with the honorary rank of major to the peace of their estates and the mild excitements of local government politics. All of them staunch Liberals, or, at least, progressive Conservatives—if I may be permitted this misnomer—they were highly cultured; graduates as a rule of the Petrograd or Moscow Universities, a number of them had dabbled, not without success, in literature and belles-lettres, the stage and music. Though well known in our twin capitals they had no permanent link with them and certainly at all times fought shy of the Imperial Court.

Need I say that most of them were passionate and accomplished sportsmen, both coursing with borzois and greyhounds, or out with a gun, and I well remember the fascinating time my sister and I had, listening to the tales of an uncle of my friend the aged B. B. Davidoff, then Presiding Judge of the Moscow High Court of Appeal, while resting shooting snipe in the Kulevatovo river meadows. His reminiscences were a mixture of his judiciary, literary and shooting experiences, always interesting either by the setting or the personalities involved, or both: such as his sketch of Yasnaya Poliana, Leo Tolstoy's place near Tula, and a shoot there, having in neighbouring stands his host on one side, and on the other—Turgenev.

Of such people were the two brothers who, having heard by bush telegraph of my expulsion several days before it happened, were now sending me, through their sister-in-law, the pressing invitation to come and stay with them as long as I liked; in fact to make their house my home for the rest of my days, if I so desired and circumstances permitted.

Grateful beyond words I nevertheless felt obliged to send a

warning of the possible danger to the Davidoffs' peaceful existence of my appearance at Kulevatovo, but I was told by Mme. D. that all this had been discussed with the "proper authorities", and a conclusion reached that, as I would not be staying at my own place, there was no harm in it. The Davidoffs themselves were, for some unaccountable reason, exempt from the ruling forbidding landowners to remain on their own estates. Given that such were the vagaries of the official mind during a revolution, I was, in my present position, delighted to accept their offer only too willingly.

And thus it happened that the next day after having seen off Mme. Davidoff on the single train by which, twice a week, our branch line was served, I myself started for Kulevatovo—a comfortable two or three hours drive away.

I had been given, by my soviet, two sturdy Ardenne half-breds from our stud, all complete with cart, and harness. This vehicle was piled high with my belongings which, by now, included some table silver and a quantity of bedding, a few small trifles in the nature of so-called *objets d'art*, collected from all over the house, and, above all, the Sosnofka game-book, kept in accurate detail ever since my brother and I first went out with a gun as boys. I had no pangs of conscience in pilfering my own home and would have taken more, had I not been wary of a possible search on the way.

The journey, well known to me of old, was uneventful, except that half-way, just as I had passed Veriatino, the village which had acquired the outlying part of the Davidoff property, I found, separated by a no-man's land of 300 yards, two opposing defensive lines, all complete with trenches, machine gun emplacements, observation posts etc., (old wives' tales had it that one side had a battery of field guns in the woods on the other side of the river—but this proved to be a slight exaggeration). They were manned, respectively, by the armed citizenry of Veriatino and Kulevatovo and commanded by officers and

N.C.O.s from their midst—all back from the wars fully equipped with rifles, machine-guns and hand-grenades, with an ample supply of ammunition. Apparently this local war was being fought over some part of the Davidoff land, which for a long time past had been claimed by both communities, and was to be settled now once and for all.

At the time, the front was quiescent pending negotiations. I was duly stopped, of course, by both sides, but in the most friendly manner—apparently my journey was expected—and my only inconvenience, if so it can be called, was the loss of time involved in being requested by the C.O.s and their staffs, on both sides, to tell the tale of my expulsion in detail. I, of course, obliged and did it to such good purpose that my thrilled and grateful audience lavishly supplied me with food and drink, in that way amply compensating me for the trifling three hours delay.

When towards nightfall I drove up to the house at Kulevato, my reception by the two brothers Davidoff and their womenfolk enchanted me, not only by its comforting friendliness but also by its exuberant manner: these dear people seemed to treat all our adventures as a huge joke to be enjoyed to the utmost. The first greetings over, the brothers there and then informed me how happy they were to have at their disposal and for nothing, an extra hand, with a pair of sound horses. This addition would, they said, make the twelve shares of land allotted to them not only a stable but, what with the black market, a flourishing holding, well able not only to support the whole tribe in necessities, but given a good harvest guarantee, for the times, a comfortable and even luxurious existence.

After a rather long and uproarious supper—the Davidoffs, all of them, were noted trenchermen indeed and able to do away with any amount of vodka without visible effects—I was conducted to my living quarters and a well-earned rest.

An enormous high room had been consigned to me, one

third of which was separated by a wooden partition reaching half-way up to the ceiling and reserved as a bedroom—the other two-thirds contained my study of which, however, one corner was occupied by a workbench and cupboard, with garden seeds, roots and bulbs, household tools, and stores, in fact, everything that a gardener handyman needs. Such being the position in the household the brothers had allotted to me, so as to be able to give all their time to work in the fields.

The large two-storied house—constructed about 1805 in the then fashionable Empire style—was an oblong cube, with spacious vaulted cellars below and a large attic, lit by four circular windows, on top. It was built of brick, with foundations of dark-red sandstone and columns, portico and window frames in white cut stone. With the main road from Tambov to Morshansk passing in front of it, it stood on the confluence of the Zna and Chelnovaya, commanding a beautiful view across the river meadows of the forest about two miles away. Quite close to one side of the house, but on a much lower level, was a deep and narrow mill-pond, formed by the Chelnovaya before it joined the Zna, a mile further on. This pond offered excellent bathing and some coarse fishing—but was reputed to be well stocked also with every conceivable kind of water sprite generally haunting mill-ponds and therefore treated with utmost apprehension and awe by women and children of all ranks and ages.

In no time I was at work from dawn till sunset attending to the kitchen garden, the cleaning of the stables and the cowshed and pigsties—we had, with mine, six horses, eight cows with calves and heifers to match, and about twelve pigs—and to the innumerable small repairs and maintenance jobs all over the farm and house which, unfortunately, included splitting logs for fuel. I had some help, but very little, from the women—my two hostesses, the wives of Alexander and Ilya, who were soon joined by Olga Nicolaevna, back from Moscow and

another lady, a distant cousin, who appeared one day out of the blue. They had their hands full in the house and the kitchen and, more important, in the dairy and fowl yard. Together with every other self-respecting male I would not lift a finger to help them in such tasks, although they provided our main articles of export to the black market—pork, butter and eggs.

And that brings me to the other main task assigned to me in our household. The black-market stuff was delivered about once a week to intermediaries, living in villages just outside Morshansk and Tambov—both about twenty miles away, and I became the accredited carrier of these goods. My usual routine was to take the weekly load by cart or sledge to these agents, starting at dusk and returning at dawn. The journey had to be concealed from the patrols of the “watchful eye”, getting busy in the neighbourhood of the towns. They were, as yet, only mildly active and often, it appeared, open to settlement on the basis of minor perquisites, but there was always the risk of a few weeks, or even longer, in a jail—by no means a pleasant prospect, especially as it would be accompanied by a total loss of the load.

I was lucky in this respect and only once met a patrol, when I was delivering a rather important item—a ten-stone pig—this time direct to a customer inside Morshansk. It happened in the depths of winter, on a clear, moonlit and very cold night in January, when, just about to enter the town, I dimly perceived some movement behind a fence surrounding a cluster of houses on one side of the road, something which looked uncommonly like sledges getting under way. That was enough for me—sharply turned round and gave rein to my Ardenne and, sure enough, when I looked back, there were three sledges moving out from behind the fence in hot pursuit. I saved myself by taking advantage of a dip in the road concealing me for a short time from my pursuers to turn off and take a side road across the Zna into the forest. Either the patrol did not see me turn

or was loath to pursue me into the forest—we black-marketeers were sometimes armed—but it soon became clear that I had shaken them off, and made my way home along the forest paths: shooting blackgame and capercailze in these parts in the past now stood me in good stead indeed. Three days later I tried again and was able to deliver the stuff safely to our customer without any trouble whatsoever.

But this happened towards the end of my stay at Kulevatovo—meanwhile the harvest was upon us, and the sowing of the winter corn: all this kept everybody breathless with work till the end of August. Some of it was excruciatingly heavy. Since the regular storehouses of the estate were now in the hands of the village soviet, cereals were stored in the roomy attics. Taking my share in the carrying of some hundreds of five-stone sacks to the top of the house will always be one of my darkest memories of the revolution.

By September things calmed down and, with the harvest safely in, I would have been able to enjoy a leisurely and dignified existence but for the fact that the indomitable Davidoffs had to start their customary season of amateur theatricals. They were all, male and female, passionately fond of the stage and so were quite a number of the villagers. Since before the revolution, therefore, the small stage in the ballroom on the second floor continuously resounded every winter with the rehearsals and performances of a most ambitious repertoire of drama and comedy, with Ilya as chief actor, producer and director in full, and very able, control.

I am glad to say that it was in no time and irrevocably established that it was impossible to entrust me with even one single line—a tiny role of an elderly gentleman in one of Ostrovsky's comedies proved that beyond any shadow of doubt. Since that moment the Kulevatovo stage remained for me a mildly annoying disturbance, slightly interfering in an existence of light work and ample and companionable leisure amongst

friends, all day long muttering snatches of their parts in a harrowed manner.

The whole village came to the Sunday performances which were so well known around the countryside that we often had guests from as far as ten miles away: I sometimes suspect that it was the popularity of this village theatre that for so long protected the life of the Davidoffs in their place from any undue interference.

And so life went on in its extraordinary mixture of peasant and squire pursuits—we even had some shooting: with the few cartridges available we were able to supply our larder with waterfowl, black-game and hares, with an occasional woodcock or snipe thrown in, when one could not resist the temptation.

And then, towards the end of October, a most anxious six weeks began: I still am amazed at how it was possible, under the circumstances, for us to emerge from what follows not only unscathed, but able to continue our existence as before and as if nothing had happened. I can only repeat once more: there are no rules of the game in a revolution . . .

It all started early one afternoon when strange doings on the main road had brought out most of the village to watch a rare and, in those days, somewhat mysterious event. A large army lorry, accompanied by two cars filled with armed men, was noisily making its way over a very bad patch of the road in front of the house. We were still listening, a quarter of an hour later, to the noise of the lorry receding into the distance towards Morshansk, when it suddenly stopped and a scattered volley of a dozen rifle shots completely shattered the peace of the countryside, not only for us, but for the whole village as well.

Full of anxious forebodings, we all made our way gloomily to our homes to await developments, with one thought in our minds "the Polchanovs again . . ." About an hour later the

tocsin sounded from the village church—and not the often heard fire-alarm—but pulsating in a new fierce rhythm, on the background of a blood-red autumn sunset, with a dark cloud-bank advancing slowly over the forest belt across the river, filling us this time with uncontrollable dread: it was the call for the general assembly on the church green, and back we were once again in the Time of Troubles.

The brothers Davidoff followed the call, whilst I—not a householder in Kulevatovo—remained behind. Night had fallen when two hours later they came back and changed hurriedly into some warmer clothing to take part in a mass search of the forest, which was to start immediately and go on, if necessary, all through the night—a *vigilante à la Russe* affair. They just had time, before going off, to give us an outline of what had taken place at the assembly.

Apparently, soon after the shooting, the man in charge of the convoy, a well known party member by the name of Fadeyev, with two men of the escort, had called, in one of the light cars, on the chairman of the village soviet, to tell him of what had happened and ordered him to raise the alarm. According to Fadeyev, the convoy, carrying on the lorry a considerable amount of currency in notes of small denomination, had been ambushed by an armed gang, which killed the drivers of the lorry, two Treasury officials and half the guard, and succeeded in getting away with several boxes of currency in the other light car. Although the members of the attacking gang were masked in kerchiefs, Fadeyev was certain to have recognised, amongst them, at least two Polchanovs and thus put the responsibility for the affray squarely on their shoulders—a sentiment which, as we have seen, was shared by us all. He had insisted then and there on immediate measures by the whole community, threatening dire reprisals in case of refusal, or even slackness, in execution. Hence the call for a general assembly and the decision to organise a search forthwith.

I must, I think, interrupt my narrative and try in a few words to explain the general consensus of public opinion about the possible behaviour of these Polchanovs in certain circumstances.

The Polchanovs were a large family, or rather family group, of well-to-do peasants, numbering four to five households and living in a large village called Russkoye, a few miles up the main road towards Morshansk. For generations past all men in these families and some of the women had been known as convinced and active Social Revolutionaries, permanently engaged in the underground activities of the extreme terrorist wing of that party. Ever since the Agrarian Troubles of 1905 they had specialised in armed robbery of banks, post offices and similar institutions and, but more rarely, landowners and their agents' offices; all this to provide funds for the underground party organisation.

Their operations throughout the years, undertaken singly or in gangs, were always spectacular, extremely daring, ruthless and sometimes murderous. As a result about half of their grown-up men and some of their women were in jail for life, and several executed during the periods of Martial Law around 1905 and 1906. The fact that in private life they were, on the whole, an eminently God-fearing, honest and hardworking people and, moreover, reputed never to have used a penny of their loot for their own profit but always on party funds, had surrounded them with an aura of grudging admiration and even respect—always on the part of the peasantry and sometimes even of the forces of law and order.

I had to take stock of their activities all through the time of my service as Marshal and, on one occasion, came into a rather unusual official contact with a young man of that ilk and his mother. This happened when a young Polchanov, due for conscription, appeared before the Conscription Board, claiming total exemption as an "only son". To support his claim, he was accompanied by his mother, as the head of the household,

which she had been since her husband was put away for life some years previously after a very daring Post Office raid. They countered my objection, based on the fact that the register contained the name of another elder son and brother, by the statement that he was, at present, lying in Saratoff jail, under sentence of death for the killing of two railway gendarmes escorting a postal van, and had therefore, for all practical purposes, ceased to exist. After deliberation the Board, admitting the soundness of the claimants' arguments, granted the young man an exemption for one year, pending future developments. The end of the story was less dramatic than could be expected—the elder brother was reprieved and joined his father in a life sentence, a fact, nevertheless, sufficient in law to procure for his brother the total exemption claimed.

The remarkable thing was that since the overthrow of the Constituent Assembly, of which one of the Polchanovs had, as of right, become a member—they had become as rabid and passionate opponents of the Soviet régime as they had been of the Imperial régime. They not only refused to take any part whatsoever in the activities of the local soviet, but did everything they could, and used all their not inconsiderable influence, to interfere with and thwart them. No wonder, therefore, that the Polchanov tribe had become prime suspects in the ambush and killing—a fact duly appreciated by all their grown-up males, who straight away disappeared from their homes before Fadeyev, reinforced by a whole detachment of Cheka men, could reach them early next morning.

Meanwhile, the only result produced by the mass search, continued night and day for nearly forty-eight hours, was the discovery of the second light car, abandoned empty along a forest track. The next thing that transpired was that the Resident Magistrate from Morshansk—an Assistant Judge of the old Court of Assizes, and still functioning as an Investigating Magistrate under the new régime—had come down and, taking

the matter out of Fadeyev's hands, was conducting the investigation through more regular and normal channels. We greeted this news with a sigh of relief, the excitement began to simmer down and we had nearly succeeded in putting the whole affair out of mind, as no immediate concern of ours, when it suddenly reared its head again in a most threatening way.

One morning, it must have been two or three days later, an armed horseman, accompanied by five or six companions, was seen entering our courtyard and riding slowly up to the porch. The Davidoffs and I, coming out to greet the newcomers, immediately recognised Fadeyev's assistant, known to us as Ivan Alexeech, and felt that something very trying was about to happen.

Large and tall, with a round, and very placid face, the man slowly dismounted from his small grey pony and came up the steps, handing over an open telegram to Alexander. I read it over his shoulder: it said—

“Arrest brothers Davidoff and Benckendorff and bring them up to Morshansk today.

Fadeyev”

Alexander returned the message, shook the man's proffered hand and said: “When do you want us to start?” “Oh, there is no hurry, we have the whole day . . . Make your own arrangements at your leisure. Any time after dinner will do perfectly. Meanwhile, do you mind if my men look over the house?—don't be afraid: it's only a formality. I am sure you have nothing *here* of what we are after . . .” All this in a calm and indifferent tone, slowly blinking his eyes, while looking the place over with his bleak and rather morose stare.

Leaving the horses with one of the men, we all trooped into the house: there everyone, of course, was already in a flutter and even subdued keening by the inevitable ancient retainers was becoming audible from the kitchen side. The brothers and I went to our respective apartments and the search started. The

men, all of them obviously regular soldiers, were rather perfunctory about it, behaved very politely and tried to disturb things as little as possible and to put them back as they found them: they even made efforts to console the ladies and crack jokes with the children. One habit of theirs, however, brought in a disturbing note: starting to search a room, they made a point of placing a revolver in full view on a table—it was removed as soon as the search was over . . .

On an impulse I released a blue tit from its cage in my room—it had been caught by one of the Davidoff boys and given to me as a present. The Cheka man who watched me doing this sighed profoundly, muttering “bad luck,” and started patting me on the shoulder consolingly.

The search was soon over, nothing was found, the men were led off to their dinner in the kitchen while Ivan Alexeech, our captor, settled down to his by himself in the pantry—“no poteen to the men” he instructed the old crone in the kitchen, while he himself had plenty. We had ours in the dining-room packed a few belongings in overnight cases and, farewells given and taken, in the early afternoon, the three of us, to the accompaniment of resumed keening, walked out to the main road—“to find transport,” as Ivan Alexeech succinctly put it.

We were lucky: in the charge of a local man and his boy two carts had just arrived, loaded with sand to mend the bad patch over which the lorry had made such heavy and noisy progress. Ivan Alexeech got hold of the driver and ordered him to get rid of his sand then and there and to take us to Russkoye straight away. He impatiently waved away the man’s protests, scribbling something meanwhile on a bit of dirty paper: “Stow it,” he growled, handing over the chit, “what are you squealing about . . . You’ll get paid more than your carcass is worth—get a move on, do.” And five minutes later, each in his own cart, we were on the move to Russkoye, escorted by all the horsemen.

It was getting dark when about an hour and a half later, we arrived there and were introduced into the offices of the local soviet. There, in a largish room, lit up only by the lamp in front of the ikon stand in the corner, we found several people sitting on benches along the walls: amongst them two Zemstvo insurance agents, vaguely known to us as Social Revolutionaries of a certain standing, engaged in an excited, but whispered, conversation. One of them, interrupting himself, addressed us with the abrupt question: "Have the executions begun?" And, sensing our consternation, resumed his hurried dialogue with his partner without waiting for an answer.

Along the opposite wall five or six women, young and old, were sitting, hands folded on their laps, in complete silence, their gaunt faces dimly lit up by the ikon light, their eyes fixed in front of them in an unblinking steady stare. They were some of the Polchanov womenfolk, brought in for questioning on the whereabouts of their men—and as rumour had it, whipped in the process.

After we had been sitting there about an hour, silent and by that time very depressed indeed, we three and the insurance men were called out to continue our journey. We had donned over our overcoats, on the insistence of our women-folk, the wide sheepskin robes used for driving in winter, though it was rather early in the season to do so. As we appeared in the doorway a man in town clothes began shouting, in an excited and angry voice, something about "extra comforts for blood-sucking oppressors,"—winding up with an order to take the robes away from us,—we complied with it by passing them to our escort.

I shall probably not be believed if I say that throughout my years in revolutionary Russia, these were the only words expressing class hatred and opprobrium—not counting Rogatka's abortive speech—that I heard as addressed to me personally, or in my presence, with intention to offend. That is not to say

that questions about the number of glasses of peasant blood I had drunk for breakfast were not current amongst my Bolshevik colleagues during my Service years—to which my obvious retort was: “How many of ‘us’ had they shot at dawn that morning?” The robes, by the way, turned up quite safely at Kulevatovo a few days later, having been looked after by the local village soviet.

On we went into the night, preceded by a lorry full of infantrymen, with one assigned to escort on foot each of our carts. These men were a different lot; Ivan Alexeech and his men passed out of our lives for ever after having delivered us to Russkoye. Our progress was slow, and we were whiling away time—the peasant driver, the escort, who hailed from Kursk, and I—by talking crops and girls, when the lorry in front of us stopped. We passed it, the brothers Davidoff in the lead, and I following, leaving the two Social Revolutionaries behind alongside the lorry.

Another ten or fifteen minutes of now silent and watchful progress and a scattered volley rang out through the night

My driver made a sort of questioning sound, looking across to the escort and avoiding my eyes—the soldier scratched his head, muttering dejectedly: “on we go, it’s none of our concern . . .”

Long afterwards, rumours, whose origin probably lay in the fact that no bodies were ever discovered, came to our ears that the men were told to run for their lives, and that the shots either missed or were on purpose aimed high—the fact is that neither of the two insurance agents were ever seen again in our parts of the world, either by their families or anyone else.

The lorry soon reappeared at our head and we continued our journey and reached the Morshansk District Court late that night, where we were received by the Resident Magistrate—the Assize Judge I mentioned before. We all knew him well from long date, and the manner of his reception, though official

and formal, left us no doubt as to his friendly feelings towards us. He told us that we would be questioned by a new régime Investigating Magistrate and introduced us to him. He turned out to be a local artisan, a saddler in fact, and was an elderly and somewhat embarrassed creature, blinking steadily at us through a pair of enormous horn spectacles. Settled in an adjoining room, with him sitting at a small table covered with all sorts of papers, we were together questioned about the whole affair.

With the gratefully accepted professional assistance of Alexander Davidoff (a former Public Prosecutor himself), the business did not take long and, after our questioner had laboriously made out a written statement, which we all signed, he regretfully announced that he had to commit us to the hands of the local Cheka and therefore jail. He expressed, it is true, his confidence that it was not for long, and the hope that we would be not too uncomfortable there.

Morshansk Jail was an altogether foul place, as I, who had been for years, as Marshal, its Commissioner, can confirm. Small, dilapidated and dirty, it had, in normal times, been used to accommodate drunks, brawlers, petty thieves and such criminal riff-raff from all over the district which the Quarter Sessions provided with sentences ranging from a few days to a twelve-month detention. Accommodation in jails is, as most people know by now, an expandable commodity, but our place could normally hold about a hundred prisoners in not too crowded conditions.

When we arrived there that night, or rather very early morning, we found about thirty inmates already divided, after the revolutionary custom, into politicals and bandits, the first consisting of a few former policemen and gendarmes, the other of the above mentioned riff-raff, with as yet no full-blooded bandits amongst them. We were received with mingled sympathy and respect by the chief jailer and his mates,

relics of the old régime (as was the Warden, who, however, kept well out of sight in his quarters across the courtyard; we did not set eyes on him all through our time there).

We were put in a fairly large and comparatively clean cell, which contained six bunks, a small table and a toilet article well known by a girlish description as *parasha*—this had to be dealt with each morning by every inmate in turn. Here we spent the best part of the next six weeks, in what would have been not intolerable conditions, were it not for the scarcity of food: our daily ration consisted of about two ounces of black rye bread and a normal portion of broth—adequate but for the fact that it consisted only of unsalted hot water with a few pieces of cabbage and grains of millet floating in it.

The whole town, by this time, being as hungry as we were soon to become, all that the jailers could smuggle in for us was a small amount of tea and sugar. We were receiving no food parcels from Kulevatovo, and this brings me to the second adverse factor, infinitely more disturbing and weighing down in particular the spirits of my two companions.

A few days after we had been jailed, parties of peasants began to arrive from all over the district, and from them we discovered—we were not locked up even at night and allowed to mingle freely with the other politicals—the cause of this lack of attention from home. The passive resistance of the peasantry to the requisitioning of food stuffs was fast developing into an armed rising, under the leadership of local war-time officers of peasant origin. It was headed by a certain Colonel Antonov, who gave his name to this armed rising of “greens”, as the insurgent peasants called themselves as distinct from the Reds and Whites. Starting way down in the south of the province and spreading north, it soon reached our district. It led to pitched battles with Cheka detachments and even some regular troops, sent to quell the rising. Both sides used reprisals, such as wholesale executions of prisoners, burnings of soviets by

one, and villages by the other, and the taking of hostages; of such were the prisoners who began to fill up our jail.

The nightly spectacle of the glare of numberless fires lighting up the skies from the windows of the jail situated on a high escarpment overlooking miles of country to the south, was a continuous and awesome reminder of the fierceness of the struggle raging out there.

Another threat, this time an internal one, greatly disturbed our peace of mind: it was the idea of jail break *en masse*, constantly fermenting amongst the prisoners, which would, if it came to a head, certainly be accompanied by the killing of the jailers and the few armed guards that were about. Constantly, if tentatively, approached, in the matter and sure, therefore, to be branded eventually as ringleaders, we had to apply all the persuasive eloquence of which we were capable to appease the excited spirits and thus ward off the danger.

Altogether, a trying and terrifying experience this six weeks stay in Morshansk Jail . . .

However, gradually the fires died down, the influx of new prisoners became a bare trickle and, towards the end of the fifth week, the trouble, as far as the Morshansk district was concerned, was over. We knew, by now, to our infinite relief, that Kulevatovo had not been involved at all, and that there peaceful conditions had continued without incident—we sometimes wondered afterwards, if our arrest, and enforced absence had not been rather lucky. In Sosnofka, where, as I now discovered, Antonov had always had a strong subsidiary organisation, a short but fierce flare-up resulted in the death of Rogatka and a whole detachment of Cheka men—perhaps Ivan Alexeech was amongst them? If so, I have a feeling of compassion for him, he was such a calm and dignified representative of his organisation . . . It was countered by the burning down of part of the Kendorskaya half, and the public execution of fifteen young officers on the market place, all of

them local peasants. Sosnofka, unfortunately, as a railhead had no chances at all in its efforts. All this, and much more we gathered from incoming prisoners, with whom, as I said before, we freely mingled the whole time.

Coming to more personal matters, I must say that I was struck by the fact of how well known, at least by reputation, I was in the whole region. Not only with regard to my political attitude and actions in the past, but also to my recent—should I say posturings?—in Sosnofka: all of them interpreted correctly, from my point of view, and mostly with ungrudging approval. This was the more interesting to me, as it was gathered from overheard conversations and talk among people who did not know who I was.

By the second week in December we were released without blemish, the amazing truth about the currency robbery having meanwhile been revealed by our friend the Judge. It was Fadeyev himself, in conspiracy with three of his men, who had planned the whole thing beforehand: it was they who shot the rest of the party, taking them by surprise, and sent one light car, loaded with several boxes of currency, to an agreed rendezvous in the forest where a hired peasant and his cart were to meet it, while Fadeyev, with the two remaining conspirators, raised the alarm in Kulevatovo. Later, after a division of spoils, the driver of the light car was given false papers by Fadeyev, disappeared and was officially declared a deserter, and never heard of again. It was that man's failure, for some unknown reason, to shoot, as planned, the hired driver of the cart, which proved to be the flaw in Fadeyev's otherwise foolproof scheme: it was through him coming forward that the Judge was in the end able to discover the truth.

Fadeyev and his two companions were promptly shot by the Cheka, which did not mince matters in affairs where their own people were proved guilty. Still, where does this leave us with regard to the two Social Revolutionary insurance agents?

But now all this was in the past—a nightmare which, however, left hardly any trace at all on our daily life or the happy and carefree mood in which we applied ourselves to its pursuits. Everything went on as before, even our black market dealings—these more cautiously and in eggs and butter only, meat, by now, being too dangerous. The countryside snow-bound there was, of course, no work at all in fields or garden; the threshing over, we had nothing to do on the farm but to attend to livestock and dairy. That left plenty of time not only for theatricals, but social evenings where, over tea, we entertained a number of guests, some from our village, but mostly belonging to the Zemstvo intelligentsia, doctors and teachers, living within driving distance.

Meanwhile, the Civil War was making itself more and more felt: the names of Denikin, pressing from the south, and Kolchak, through Siberia from the east, were in everybody's mouth, and partial mobilisation of young men into what was now called the "Red Army" had started. All this news was received by the countryside with very mixed feelings indeed—nobody seemed to be able to make up his mind definitely for which side he would eventually stand; till the threat from Poland put an end for everyone to all uncertainty.

Not for long was I able to enjoy my placid existence at Kulevatovo—another change, and, as usual, a drastic one, was in store for me . . .

One morning—late in March or early in April, 1919, I think it was—a mounted messenger, from the Sosnofka soviet—he proved to be one of our younger under-keepers—came and handed me a pink form. It was an individual mobilisation order, ordering the naval serviceman, former Commander, Constantine Benckendorff to report, within three days, to the Assembly Depot at Morshansk for further posting.

So strongly was I, at that time, under the influence of the prevailing uncertainty, that at first, I could not make up my

mind at all as to what to do: I could, of course, disappear, with a fair margin of safety: one of the executives of the Sosnofka soviet had supplied me, soon after I had come to Kulevatovo and entirely on his own initiative without a hint from me, with the passport and other papers belonging to a Latvian of my age and general description who, whilst visiting Sosnofka on business during the previous summer, had died there. As Russian identity papers in those days did not carry either photos, thumb mark, or even signature, these documents were quite serviceable in my case, and nearly foolproof, provided I got away from our neighbourhood. Yet, the alternative to complying with the order was to desert, and that certainly would be difficult without endangering the Davidoffs' position at Kulevatovo.

To gain time I decided on a little malingering: a heavy cold in the chest posing as bronchitis got me ten days deferment from a kindly disposed Medical Board. On that occasion I found out from the Military Commandant of the Depot that I was to be posted to the Naval General Staff now transferred to Moscow. This put a quite different complexion on the whole problem: it could mean for me, as I imagined, a position not only affording a close view of the workings of the new régime at high level but also a point of vantage from which not only the general national, but also the world, situation could be surveyed and appreciated.

That was a prospect too good to be missed for a man of my inveterate curiosity and well worth the risk which sticking out one's neck in times of revolution cannot fail to contain. By the end of my deferment my mind therefore was made up; I packed my bag and, accompanied by the best wishes of my hosts, distressed at my departure, made my way over Morshansk to Moscow.

I was, though I did not know it at the time, leaving my homeland for the last time and forever. In the recent nine-

months of my stay it had been given to me to find out more about the lives and the work, the hopes and expectations, the habits and prejudices of its people than in all the years before, and my devotion to them had become even deeper than in the past. I hope, also, that those who have followed me so far in this tale will be brought nearer to sharing my conviction that the Russian peasantry, far from being a mass of ignorant, backward, recently liberated slaves, are a highly intelligent, politically conscious and independent community, entirely capable of looking after their own country both in internal and external affairs, and therefore the determining factor in the present and future of their country.

CHAPTER VII

SERVICE IN THE RED NAVY

I REACHED Moscow after a slow journey, marked only by the loss of the favourite of my two flutes, left behind on a luggage rack, while changing trains in a hurry at Riazan, in those times a whole day's journey from my destination, instead of the normal two hours. I should say here that, since early boyhood, I was an untiring, but very shy performer, on this most ancient of instruments. In all my peregrinations since the beginning of the war my flutes never left me: they tried even to compete with the howling Arctic gales at Murmansk.

The Moscow I found was outwardly not much different from the one I knew when I first reached it from Mohilev, except that the food situation was becoming very bad indeed and the political tension had increased correspondingly. Here the link between the two phenomena was evident, the former being in direct relation to the intensity of the Civil War and the Western intervention on behalf of the Volunteer Army.

Before reporting to the Genmor—Naval General Staff in the customary abbreviated form—I made sure of living-quarters and was happy to find that the Iliynskis, as before, had a room to spare and were glad to let me have it. It was, by that time, in a way a good thing to have a serviceman posted to one of the Central Staffs as a lodger: the armed services had in everyday life, quite apart from the advantages of their food rations, already achieved a sort of independence from at least the petty interferences of the "watchful eye."

The Genmor occupied the whole of a large mansion,

formerly the home of one of Moscow's industrial magnates: my appearance there was full of pleasant surprises for all concerned. My colleagues greeted me with uproarious delight at my appearing in what was practically a yokel's garb—the only clothes I had at the time—and, for those who had known me before, healthy slimness and perfect physical condition. I myself was not less delighted to find that most of them were known to me, at least by reputation, amongst them quite a few old shipmates and friends.

The first day was spent in going over the whole place, introducing me to the various departments and sections and their staffs: it was a curious sensation to find transferred, out of past times and places, an institution, in atmosphere and spirit so entirely unchanged. Here they were, the old chiefs, who had occupied their seats at the Admiralty in Petrograd since time began, down to the messengers, all of them retired captain's coxes and behaving accordingly. The only revolutionary change that was allowed to creep in was a bevy of young lady typists, most of them charming and, considering the times, smart in appearance, belonging, as I discovered, to the best circles of Moscow's former beau-monde. Not one Party Member, or shadow of one, except for Staff Commissar. . . .

There was a difference, though, in the outer appearance of the personnel: everybody was dressed in a mixture of uniform with various civilian items thrown in and with no badges of rank. These being abolished, everyone was called by the designation of his post. We addressed each other by name and patronymic—the term *tovarich* (comrade) still being tacitly avoided, both by former officers and by ratings. The latter, however, still strictly observed the Service's rules of behaviour between ranks.

The next day I was introduced to the Chief of Staff, Captain Behrens. He was a brilliant Staff College man, only a year or two my senior in promotion, and had been, for some time

before the Revolution, one of the leading lights at the Admiralty, as head of one of its most important departments. Always of strongly marked Leftist inclinations—he had made his choice of allegiance soon after the overthrow of the Provisional Government—it was he who was primarily responsible for the preservation of the central operational and administrative apparatus of the Navy, and even increasing its efficiency under new conditions. He was a man of high moral courage, with a tremendous capacity for work and, at the same time, infinite tact. All this linked with a charming, if slightly sardonic, personality which contributed a great deal to the success of his endeavours. Behrens never was a member of a political party, ruling or otherwise, but just a man convinced of his duty to do everything in his power to preserve and hand over, from the old régime to the new, one of the country's armed services in an as perfect and stable condition as possible. The man, and his views, suited me perfectly, and his example contributed very much to the conviction that I myself had made the right choice.

I found Captain Behrens at a vast writing table in an enormous study at the top of the building where, after having acknowledged my official report for duty, he greeted me warmly and, turning to the only other occupant of the room—a good looking young lady, not much over twenty-five, in a well-made dark blue *tailleur*—sitting in an armchair next to the table, said: "This, Ariadna Nicolaevna, is our new collaborator I have been speaking to you about. He knows all the languages and all Europe like the inside of his hand. We had some difficulty in fishing him out of his ancestral home, where he has been reclining, in perfect idleness, for the last year or so. He will, I hope, be of great help to us with the gentlemen at the Metropole" (at the time the seat of the Foreign Commissariat).

I was so flustered that I nearly kissed the beautifully mani-

cured hand proffered me with a charming smile and the words: "How lucky for me—I am sure you will be able to advise me about all the new books from abroad." I was then informed by my Chief that this was our Staff Commissar, the highest ranking person, after him, in the whole organisation!

Ariadna Nicolaevna, whose surname I have unfortunately entirely forgotten, was the daughter of a well-known Professor of Classical Philosophy at Moscow University, and had been a fervent Bolshevik since her own undergraduate days, and a full blown member of that party since the age of 18. But at the same time, she was also a budding poet, who had recently—privately it is true—published a booklet of lyrical verse of great charm and promise, as I was able to ascertain from a copy she presented me later on.

Ariadna Nicolaevna took no special interest in service matters and was not too regular in attendance at her own office, but certainly was an admirer of Behrens himself and greatly attracted by him. Some had it that it was on this basis that our wily chief was able to provide his staff with a political supervisor so desirable in every way.

Her ultimate fate was sad: as the Civil War grew hotter, tired of what she herself considered a sinecure and urged by her passionate party convictions, she obtained a seconding to the Air Force as an observer, and was soon shot down and killed near Tsaritsin (the future Stalingrad) on the Volga.

The Chief of Staff's hint about the nature of my future duties proved only too correct: I became a sort of Admiralty representative and liaison officer in all matters where international maritime relations were concerned. When I reached the table assigned to me in one of the Genmor's offices, I found it piled high with fat and ancient files, containing a curious mixture of subjects, most of them of relatively small importance and even less current interest, but which all had been

going on for years in slow and measured tempo. Besides such things as debatable points arising out of the neutrality of the Aaland Islands, the passage of men-o'-war in and out of the Baltic and the Black Sea, with one or two other matters I have forgotten, they were concerned, above all, with fishing rights and disputes, leading inevitably to the claim for a widening of the three-mile coastal limit, which Russia was by no means the only country to stake, against then, as now, strong opposition from Great Britain. Although there was, tucked away in the depths of the Commissariat of Agriculture, a department from time immemorial (i.e. Peter the Great), concerned with fisheries, it was the Admiralty which had to do the final co-ordinating before the case was passed on to Foreign Affairs for further simmering.

Profoundly alarmed and dazed, I sat down to make some sort of sense for my completely ignorant self and, had it not been for an aged Chief Writer assigned to me, called Gusev, I very much doubt if I would ever have succeeded in doing so. Though very low ranking, containing besides myself only the inestimable Gusev and, later on, a young wartime sub-lieutenant, a university graduate and excellent linguist, my section had the great advantage of being of no particular interest to my superiors, which left me completely independent and master of my time.

Another pleasant and peaceful mode of existence followed: after an hour or two of work and preparation at the Genmor, I trotted off to various committees, conferences and information talks, mostly at the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, but also at that of Defence and other Commissariats, including the highest level of the Cheka, to give and argue Admiralty views on a varied if limited number of subjects, which, however, had practically nothing to do with the Civil War or with the revolution either.

And so I soon settled down to a life which if not devoid of

interest, was far from giving me the opportunity to penetrate the inner workings of the state machinery. Though from departmental gossip I knew, of course, a lot more about current affairs, I was as surprised and caught unawares by any startling development in inland politics as any man in the street.

Quite frequently in touch with party members of secondary rank I only once had the opportunity of meeting luminaries of the first order: on one occasion, I was involved in a number of discussions at the Foreign Affairs Commissariat on some obscure point concerning our treaty rights in the joint Russo-Persian fisheries in the southern Caspian and in the course of those had been slowly propelled upwards, till I found myself, at 11 p.m., in the presence of Tchecherin, the head of soviet foreign affairs—the Commissariat working the clock round on the insistence of this untiring enthusiast.

The famous first Commissar for Foreign Affairs, an elderly, absent-minded gentleman, was wallowing, in his shirtsleeves, in what he himself called the "centre of radio waves;" sending and receiving by air an incessant flow of announcements to and from all over the world, brought to him by a never-ending chain of harrowed underlings. When I, not without difficulty, succeeded in getting his ear, he, after listening to me impatiently for a few moments, said: "I don't know, I don't know a *thing* about this—you'll have to go and talk it over with Menzhinsky . . ."

As I was about to turn and go, he suddenly looked at me, for the first time attentively, and said: "You are from Tambov, and Sofia Petrovna Benckendorff's son? How is Aunt Helena?" . . . Aunt Helena, born Tchecherin, was the widow of Emanuel Narishkin, first gentleman of the Empire, whose family, always conscious that Peter the Great's mother had been of the same ilk, never condescended to accept a title from the Romanoffs.

Left a widow, some time just before the revolution, Aunt

Helena continued to live in Tambov as an uncrowned queen, scarcely at all interfered with by the authorities. Noting, not without surprise, that the famous Commissar, who had, as a young Foreign Office clerk, abandoned his career and considerable inheritance to join the revolutionaries in exile, was still well up in intricate family connections—my mother was a Narishkin, on her mother's side—I gave him the news of Aunt Helena and, seeing the gleam of interest fading from his eyes, left for the next stage of my errand.

Menzhinsky, who was my next objective, had a room in the same Metropole, the enormous palace hotel occupied by the Foreign Commissariat. He was then a co-ordinator between the State Security Service, including the Cheka, and the rest of the administration. Though of Polish origin, he was a man of rather placid, if painstaking, disposition and listened carefully to my exposé. I was coming to the end of it when a tall spare man with an ascetic face and sombre eyes, walked unannounced and in haste into the room, on his way through to another destination. Menzhinsky intercepted him and said: "Listen for a moment what the Persians have to say now about . . .". "Not now, for God's sake," came from the newcomer, "not now . . . Persians indeed . . . let Tchecherin and the sailors do whatever they choose about it." And he left as abruptly as he had come, still muttering: "Persians indeed" . . . This was Dzerzhinsky, another Pole, the awe-inspiring First Chief of the Cheka and, after Lenin and Trotsky, perhaps the best known and certainly the most feared name in the Soviet Republic . . .

Menzhinsky collapsed, sent me away with a flea in my ear, and Behrens, though as always amiable, had not very agreeable things to say to me next morning. The Persians got no reply, the affair was bandied about some more between bottlenashers, and died a natural death soon afterwards.

In my free time I had a quiet, but pleasant, life: there were

the Ilinskys with whom, both husband and wife, I had the friendliest possible relations, and there was their large circle of friends, for whom their flat was a social centre. Seldom an evening passed without a few dropping in for tea, mostly lawyers and other professional people, and hardly anything of what was going on in town escaped them—everything was closely scrutinised and the resulting opinions provided extremely interesting discussions.

The departmental head of Genmor's legal department had a flat in the same house, and through him I became acquainted with his brother-in-law, the composer Nicholas Miaskovsky. Of all the arts music always held a dominant position for me, and Miaskovsky and his circle of friends gave me the first opportunity to become acquainted with the musical world in a town where the highest standards of the profession had always been the rule, and were not in the least affected by the great revolutionary upheaval.

I shall have more to say about this circle of friends and acquaintances during the not too distant time when I once more reverted to civil life.

So the spring and summer passed, during which the Soviet Government not only victoriously repulsed all attacks, but was able to stabilise the situation by concluding peace with some of the new powers that had seceded from the old Empire. When, late in this year the turn of Esthonia came, I was chosen by Behrens as naval adviser to the peace delegation, which was going to that country with at its head, Dr. Joffé, the future Soviet Ambassador to the Court of St. James.

I was, of course, delighted at this appointment—in the view of many somewhat surprising—mainly because it would give me the opportunity of getting at last a glimpse of the world outside. So completely had I been out of touch with it that since the overthrow of the Provisional Government, had had no communication at all even with my mother and sister in England.

When, late one evening, I boarded the special train which was to take the Peace Delegation to the Esthonian border, I found there my Army colleague, an aged and rather grumpy Lieut.-General (an eminent Staff College professor and in the past a Divisional Commander on the Riga front). He introduced me to the Foreign Affairs staff of the Delegation, all of them, bar two female typists, party members.

Soon afterwards the train got under way and I was sent for by Dr. Joffé, whom I found alone in his first-class compartment. A rather handsome, bearded, man of about forty-five, with the pronounced features of his race and extremely intelligent dark eyes (he was a Jew and one of those, the best to my liking, who make no bones about it). Dr. Joffé was a typical representative of the Bolshevik wing of the Social Democratic Party: a member of it since his university days, he was actively and deeply involved in its underground activities, long before the war and revolution. He was implicated in an important revolutionary action soon after he had started work as a Zemstvo Doctor, and this got him a sentence of twelve years hard labour. Of these he had served several when the revolution released and raised him to the important position he now occupied in the councils of the party.

A widely read man of great culture and with perfect German and good French at his disposal, he had this in common with the best representatives of the revolutionaries of his generation: he not only freely admitted the right, but openly conceded the duty, of the old régime to suppress revolutionary action by every means at its disposal. He consequently bore no grudge for the vicissitudes he himself had had to undergo and had no ill-feeling at all towards the representatives of the past—he considered them rather as fallen foes vanquished in fierce, but honest, combat. He seemed now, when his and the hands of his comrades were at the tiller, more in sympathy with his



THE AUTHOR WITH HIS FATHER

former adversaries than with some of the newcomers with whom power had to be shared.

He greeted me with great courtesy and after having told me that he had been favourably impressed by all the information that had reached him about my work at the Genmor, he guided the conversation over to the business ahead of us, in giving me to understand how lucky the Delegation was to have at its disposal, the services of a man of my *ambiance*—using the French term as expressing his meaning more subtly than “background”. Our first talk lasted for two hours, well into the night, and, after the problems ahead, in which the interests of the Navy would be concerned, had been discussed, it ranged over the whole wide field of contemporary politics.

I contributed an account of my life at Sosnofka and Kulevatovo, the motives that made me go there, and the conclusions that my experiences had enabled me to arrive at. It was not without surprise that I found that, on the whole, he was inclined to agree with them; he shared, in the main, my opinion that an understanding with the peasantry was by far the best solution for a satisfactory and stable future of the country, and that a compromise on lines much more akin to mine than the course of current trends foreshadowed should be aimed at. It must have been this general attitude, becoming gradually more and more unorthodox, that forced him to resort to suicide as a final way out, just before the first great purge in the Party began years later. Yet his discourse left no possible doubt that his views were in strict conformity with those of Lenin: he did not refrain from criticising those of Trotsky, thus giving me, in that heyday of Bolshevik unity and success, a fore-warning, if ever so slight, of things to come.

This first talk established, in every way, a satisfactory relationship between us and had, perhaps, the result that sometimes, during the negotiations, he called me in for private discussion of points which were quite outside my competence.

I would like to add as a characteristic detail an attitude Joffé shared with many revolutionaries of his time and generation, an invincible aversion to all agents of State Security, be it of the Right or Left. This became manifest to me when he, in parting that first evening, said in his affable and gay manner: "By the way, Benckendorff, beware of X" (naming a member of the staff) "he is one of the 'gendarmes': I would hate us both to get into hot water on his account."

Next evening we left the train and by a short sledge drive reached the Soviet Russian front line, separated from the Esthonian at that point by about half a mile of no-man's-land. Observing the time honoured ceremonial we then, preceded by a trumpeter bearing a white flag, and escorted by an officer's patrol, walked half-way across a bridge over a small stream, where a corresponding detachment of Esthonians was awaiting us.

The two escort commanders, accompanied by their trumpeters, met in the middle of the bridge, and after smartly saluting each other exchanged a few words. The Russian then stepped back, and the Esthonian waved us on and we crossed the bridge and were offered seats in a number of sledges assembled there in charge of civilian drivers. Our eyes were bound with our own handkerchiefs—I, having none handy, was lent one by Dr. Joffé—and blindfolded passed the opposing front line to reach the soil of the Esthonian Socialist Republic.

After a short greeting by a representative of its government another short sledge drive took us to the nearest railway station, and soon we were on our way to the provincial town of Dorpat (Juriev), where the Peace Conference was to take place. Ancient and small, Dorpat had the distinction of being the seat of a fourteenth century university, entirely German in tone and background and reproducing, not without success, the small but famous universities of that country such as Bonn or Jena. It always had been the *Alma Mater* of most of the Baltic

barons, who kept up this resemblance by firmly established student "corps" ceremonials, beer feasts and duels, resulting in faces marked for life by the stitches of old cuts. The population spoke Baltic German, even in the street, with only occasional Esthonian phrases and, as a rule, kept itself very much to itself as far as we were concerned.

It was against such a somewhat incongruous background that our protracted and tedious negotiations started, a day or two after our arrival. They were held in one of the administrative buildings of the University, in which a large room was used for conferences while two entirely separate wings were adapted for the respective chancelleries. The whole of our delegation was housed in a large villa just outside the town, put at our disposal by the Government: there we were fed—extremely well—by a local caterer. As we were not supposed to make any contact with the population, this arrangement suited everyone very well indeed.

Business started briskly and well, as both sides were only too eager to come to a speedy settlement. But, as usual, it was the relatively minor points which held us up—amongst them the questions concerning the armed forces. On the Naval side, things were not too bad: my opposite number, being an officer of the Merchant Marine (the mainstay of the Russian Wavy Navy) and former Assistant Harbour-Master of the port of Reval, was completely crushed by the aura with which my former rank in the Imperial Navy and my present position in what he still seemed to consider its General Staff, surrounded me, and prepared, without demur, to agree to everything I proposed. One question only caused some delay: it concerned a flotilla of armed launches on lake Ilmen, halved by the new frontier line. Unfortunately the Army, because of the inland position of the lake, felt obliged to take a hand: this in itself of course, meant trouble, in view of the relationship between the representatives of the two armies.

General Leydonner, now Commander-in-Chief of the Esthonian Army, was a former Captain of the Imperial Army and, during the war, on my General's Divisional Staff after having been his pupil at the Staff College. All this the latter could never forget and, both in tone and manner, kept harking back to the days when his word was law. The other therefore felt compelled to prove the authority and dignity of his present position. In consequence, when we four met,—we worked by ourselves, the delegations proper always accepting our agreed findings—proceedings having started in a dignified and courteous manner, the atmosphere soon, under the influence of the increasing growl in my General's voice and the brisk and stinging replies of his young opponent, did not fail to thicken. Sometimes it became so threatening that I, with my naval colleague shuddering in a corner, fearing the worst, had figuratively speaking, to hang on to their coat tails to prevent them from coming to blows. . . .

At last, one way or another, all difficulties were overcome both by us and the conference in general and only one important item remained on the agenda. It concerned the division, or rather redistribution, of the carcass of the old Empire: the spoils included that of the gold reserve of the Russian State Bank, a proportional part of which had to be allotted to each seceding power. The sum that the Esthonians claimed made us all gasp: if such a sum had to be allotted to a small and not too thickly populated province, and the other seceders treated in proportion, nothing at all of the gold reserve would have been left for Russia proper.

Day after day Dr. Joffé battled, using every possible and impossible argument and threat at his disposal—but the Esthonians did not budge and stoutly stood their ground.

It fell to me—and *I am* rather proud of this—to find a way to reduce their resistance. Moved by a vague recollection, I wired home asking for the total, in gold roubles, of the ad-

vances paid by the Admiralty to two main, and a host of lesser, shipyards and connected engineering works in Reval and other Esthonian ports, for items ordered since long before and during the war, for which delivery was still pending.

The reply, needing some research, arrived nevertheless within a week, in the form of an enormous file borne by my inestimable Gusev in person—he had fought recklessly to come with it, arguing fiercely that I, by myself, would never be able to cope.

The result was extremely satisfactory—the total supplied by the file deducted from the sum demanded by the Esthonians, left a balance in their favour roughly equivalent to what Russia was prepared to let them have as their share of the gold reserve. Dr. Joffé, therefore, opened the next session by demanding restitution by the Esthonians of the said advances. I took up the tale and started reporting to the conference the detailed figures from a *précis* in front of me. Not quite able to make out a somewhat blurred figure, I hesitated and just turned my head in the direction of Gusev, sitting behind me at a small table overlaid with files, when his voice sounded in clear and measured tones, across the conference chamber: “33,567 roubles and 60 kopecks in gold, *Your Brilliance*”—using the style appropriate to my former title. A slight gasp fluttered round the table, then dead silence prevailed for the few seconds I needed to collect my senses and I continued my report . . .

The scheme worked—the Esthonians gave in, and a compromise was soon reached on the Russian proposal to waive their new claims if the Esthonians correspondingly reduced their share of the gold reserve. A few days later the Peace Treaty was signed, and we went back to Moscow by the same route we had come.

But this did not end my diplomatic career: I was next appointed, this time as fully accredited member, to the Frontier Delineation Commission, which was to accompany the newly

designated First Soviet Minister to the Esthonian Republic, due to leave at the head of his Legation in a few weeks' time.

So back I went to Esthonia, first to Reval and later to a little provincial town, about an hour away by rail. This time, we had the advantage of being able to go about freely, and mingle with the natives. There was very little to do in naval matters, and what there was I soon settled with the Chief of Staff of the new Esthonia, navy, an old friend and shipmate of mine.

We were able to get through our business in the intervals of going the rounds of the old haunts of the Baltic Fleet, now, alas, either deserted or with a sprinkling only of measly black-marketeers, instead of the uproarious crowd of juniors on shore leave from the fleet. He was a navigator like myself, but of outstanding excellence, and well known throughout the Navy by the ridiculous nickname of "Annushka" (Annie) and popular as a witty raconteur of stories which made even ward-rooms blush.

A Baltic Baron, belonging to the first German family settled in that part of the world in the thirteenth century under the aegis of the Teutonic Knights, he counted amongst his forebears the famous Chancellor of Frederick II—the great crusading Emperor of the Roman Empire of German tongue.

A confirmed bachelor, very fond of his food and drink, he spurned the society of all women, except those who would accept his company for a short while against "appropriate remuneration" as he used to put it.

It was he, the wily old bird, who had substituted the innocent merchant sailor for himself at the Peace Conference, partly to obviate possible clashes and thereby simplify matters, and also perhaps to emphasise his egalitarian attitude and thus enhance his democratic disposition. When I last heard of him he was stationed near Biarritz, as one of the League of Nations International Observer Corps, to prevent war contraband

entering Spain, then in the throes of Civil War. What a good time he must have had there!

My chief personal anxiety, of course, was to get news of my mother, and try to establish some contact with her: as I mentioned before, we were separated by years of ignorance in complete mutual silence. As I did not know her address since she had left the Embassy after my father's death, I decided to send a telegram addressed to "Henry Asquith, House of Commons," certain that it could not fail to reach its destination. And I was right in my expectations, for the very next day I was rewarded by a long reply, signed by Mrs. Asquith, giving me all the information I needed and enthusiastically acclaiming my reappearance from Limbo.

Arthur Ransome, then a correspondent of one of the leading British newspapers, enlightened me on the course of the war since Russia gave up and the world situation in general. I also met a number of people socially in Reval, both native and foreigners, and was courteously received everywhere. This contributed very much to a more balanced view of things present and to be expected in the future than I had been able to achieve from the strictly one-sided appreciation in Moscow.

The only trying time I had was when I happened to meet, at a private party, a Captain from the British Squadron lying at anchor in Reval. He chose to start our conversation by asking me, rather pointedly, if all the members of the Russian leisured class were able to live as well as I had the opportunity of doing in Esthonia? Rather stung by this, I felt compelled to answer that there were no "leisured people" in Russia, as everyone had their hands full coping with foreign intervention. A remark justified, if admittedly only in part, by the fact that, not long before, R.N. torpedo boats had attacked the main base of the Baltic Fleet at Kronstadt. Thus our talk came to an abrupt end, and for the rest of the evening we—the two rugged

sailors—glared fiercely at one another, causing some discomfort to our by now neutral hosts.

I was asked by our Minister to accompany the first British Labour Delegation on their way to Petrograd, as an extra guide interpreter. I was pleased to do so, as it gave me more news from England, and the chance of meeting Mrs. Philip Snowden, a charming lady who was most helpful in that respect. We travelled in great luxury in a fully fledged international *Wagon-lit* Express, with all the traditional trimmings including the dark-brown uniforms of the attendants. When the train stopped at the first Russian station I was privileged to watch a young good-looking Italian Bolshevik greet the land of socialism: bareheaded, he jumped out of the train, ran a little way into the muddy marshland and, kneeling down kissed the sacred earth, which left dirty smudges all over his face.

Arriving on this occasion at Petrograd for the first time since the overthrow of the Provisional Government, I hastened to find my old Uncle, Paul Benckendorff, my father's brother, who was still living there in luxurious penury. He, the late Marshal of the Imperial Court, had not been troubled by the authorities, except for a fortnight's stay at the Petrograd Cheka, where nothing untoward happened. I found him and his wife, Aunt Mary, in good health and spirits and was able to provide them with a stock of food, the thing they needed most. I was much gratified that when I told Uncle Paul, in detail, the why and wherefore of my not only remaining in Russia but serving under the present government, he not only entirely approved, but thought it the only right, if not very sensible, thing to do. His attitude was the first real encouragement of value to me that I had received.

It was during this stay in Esthonia that I visited, as it happened for the first time, the ancestral home of my family which, early in the century, had passed through marriage to

the Princes Volkonsky, who were still living there. A few miles from Reval on the shores of the Finnish Gulf, the large and handsome mid-eighteenth century residence, with century old oak trees in the park descending right down to the sea, had been known to me before only as a navigational landmark—a tiny engraving on an Admiralty chart, the type well known to all who have to handle these. I now had the opportunity of verifying the correctness of the Admiralty Survey draughtsmen.

Our stay was drawing to a close and I was, in spite of the good time I had had all round, glad of this: the reason was that during the last weeks our Commission had been temporarily entrusted with a new and disagreeable task. The repatriation of the members—officers and men—of the “Judenitch Corps,” a White Force which, under the General of that name, had, the summer before, unsuccessfully attacked Petrograd, or as I should call it now, Leningrad, and was now interned in Esthonia. The Esthonians pressed us to speed up the process, there being no love lost between the two parties: the White Russians accusing the Esthonians of letting them down by not supporting their venture by an armed force (which was true, but could not be helped at the time), and the Esthonians countering by accusing the White Russians of frightful depredations and outrages while based on that country before their attack (which was also true, if considerably exaggerated).

On the other hand those officers and men, being mostly deserters from the Red Army, were not at all confident of what to expect on their return to Russia, and therefore reluctant to do so. The rights of political asylum for prisoners of war not having, in those days, made its appearance in the field of international discussions, the whole was a messy and disagreeable problem, with which I was grateful to have nothing to do, there being no sailors amongst the interned.

In consequence, everybody in the Commission was delighted

when another special Delegation arrived to deal with the question, and in midsummer we, having finished our other tasks, were able to return home.

It soon transpired that for me, at least, home did not mean a return to my routine duties. One more border state—this time in the extreme south—having made peace with its former master, was now due to receive a Frontier Delineation Commission and in it I—as Behrens put it, “as by right”—took my accustomed place.

The country this time was Georgia (the Russians call it Gruzia and the natives something else again, and just as different), one of the three Transcaucasian Republics which had constituted themselves as independent national states—the others being Armenia and Azerbeidjan. Their respective capitals were Tiflis, till 1812 that of the last Christian kingdom in the Middle East, Erzerum near Mount Ararat, of Biblical fame, and Baku, of a more recent one as the site of the first oil field in any way comparable with its transatlantic predecessors. This last Republic, however, had already, significantly enough, surrendered part of its sovereignty by joining the Soviet Union.

They were separated from the Russian plain by the Caucasian range, from the dawn of history the threshold of Europe. In stumbling over it the innumerable hordes of invaders had left a human residue, whose descendants clinging to its heights in large and small tribes were the fiercest, noblest and most independent fighting set of robbers that ever infested an inaccessible mountain fastness. These were finally brought to heel by the Imperial power in 1860, after a century of pressure and border strife, when their last leader, the Imam Shamil, surrendered his powers to Alexander II, the Tsar Liberator. This contest gave

Russian, and perhaps world, literature, some immortal pages by three of its greatest—Pushkin, Lermontov and Tolstoy—a proof, if ever one was needed, of its impact on the imagination of the Russian people, both by the manner in which the campaign was conducted and the character of the foe.

This mountain war, as many Imperial contests before and since, claimed the life of one of my forebears. My grandfather and namesake, wounded in one of the bigger mountain expeditions in the 1840s, received further severe sword cuts when the convoy, by which he was returning to base, was ambushed on the Ossetian military highway—a fact later commemorated on a stone by the wayside still there for me to see on my way to Georgia. He died of these wounds a few years later, a comparatively young man at the beginning of a promising diplomatic career.

I had my first view of this glorious country when, on a beautiful July morning, our Delegation reached the railhead at Vladikavkas, from where we were to continue our journey by car across the mountain range by the famous Georgian highway, which, gradually completed against the fierce resistance of the tribes around, had been for a long time the only, and none too safe, overland way of reaching Transcaucasia from Russia. While our convoy of cars was being assembled, I had here my first glimpse of those tribesmen in an original and significant setting.

At the time a conference was in progress in Vladikavkas, at which a delegation from the Ingush section of the well-known Circassians was making their peace with the Soviet Government, and establishing the conditions by which their autonomous region was to come into being. I was privileged to be invited to that day's session, during which the most debatable point of the negotiations was hotly discussed. The tribe, small in numbers, lived in almost inaccessible parts of the

western range in small townships, which looked from the distance like enormous slightly dishevelled martin's nests, insecurely fastened against the steep slopes of the valleys, at such a height that in addition to their mountain ponies goats were the only livestock which could follow them there.

Hairy, and extremely untidy, in dirty rags in lieu of clothes, but with their weapons—ancient scimitars, daggers and firelocks, all inlaid in silver and gold—beautifully kept, those “fighting beggars” as they were called, looked as if they were making a precarious living from hunting and armed raids on the Cossacks in the valleys. In reality they were very well off, for they had a source of income that throughout the centuries never failed: they bred the most beautiful girls, in a land world-famous for them anyway. The right to continue the traditional practices by which that natural phenomenon was put to use by the tribe, was being hotly debated at this session.

At regular intervals special agents went around the tribe to collect its marketable girls for conveyance to well-to-do harems in Turkey and Persia,—mostly to Constantinople. There the girls were adopted, brought up and educated with the children of the household, to become wives and mothers of equal standing with them.

The girls were sold at the age of eight or nine and at a price in gold ranging upwards from £200 and sometimes reaching as high as £1,000. They accepted their future with delight, were proud of the price they fetched as denoting not only their own attractions, but also the standing of their future home, able to pay it. The rare rejects felt this as a blot for life and were in difficulties to find local husbands, the more so as they had to overcome competition from the top layer of beautiful girls who were never sold, but kept (considerably distressed as I was creditably informed) by the tribe itself as future mothers.

The practice was not unusual all over the Mahommedan Caucasus, but elsewhere not so decisive an economic factor

with prices paid, ranging only between £50 and £100, nowhere near those obtained by the Ingush. This last bit of information might, however, have been a bit of advertising on the part of the Ingush who gave it me—the difference in prices was not justified by the examples of female beauty I was privileged to observe in the next month or so all over the country.

The tribesmen, I am glad to say, stood their ground successfully at the Conference against the stern demand of the Soviet Government for the abolition of the certainly unlawful practices, previously, however, always winked at by the Imperial Government. I wonder how the Ingush are faring now, after the Ataturk uprooted the old way of life in Turkey—perhaps the beauty of their daughters will now be of less exclusive benefit to the human race than before? I would not put it past them to manage that, even under the iron rule of the U.S.S.R. . . .

It was, I think, a day or two after our arrival at Vladikavkas that our convoy, consisting of five cars and a lorry for the luggage, started its journey across the range by the Georgian military highway. This road is a remarkable achievement of the Russian Army Engineering Corps, both in planning and construction and, I believe, the only one in the world which in a comparable latitude allows wheeled traffic to reach the eternal snowline. It follows, at first, as far as possible, the course of one of the Kuban river's tributaries, and then begins to rise sharply along the slopes of several steep valleys in innumerable zigzags till, after a short panting effort along a dark canyon, whose sombre rocky walls rise nearly vertically up both sides, it enters a short covered way constructed there to prevent the blocking of the passage by snow in the winter. A few moments of nearly complete darkness and the road emerges in full daylight on to a vast plateau—the watershed of the pass.

Here to me—essentially a man of open spaces and high seas

—was vouchsafed the most profound and moving visual impression I had experienced either before or ever afterwards in life. So strong must have been the staggered surprise on my face that my driver, a border Cossack, was moved to say: "You'd come here every day for a thousand years—it's always the same, you can never see enough of it."

Imagine standing on a snow-covered plateau and having an all-round view—the eyes see far in that crystal clear air—of row upon row of snow-covered peaks and crags in the most fantastic array of shapes and contours, topped to the west by the incomparable soaring thrust of the Casbek and, far to the east, the towering sullen mass of the Shatgora, bathed all glittering and scintillating in the intensity of the subtropical midday sun, and standing out against the deep indigo shadows of the valleys—and you will perhaps be able to join me, if in part only, in the feeling of awestruck exhilaration, nay—levitation—that overcame me. It was as if the soul-shattering sound of the final climax of the greatest symphony by the greatest composer the world would ever bring forth, had been reached, and stirred all the senses to the utmost by its impact.

After the short level span of the plateau had been crossed, we started on our descent into the Transcaucasian plain, by a just as steep and tortuous route, till we reached the upper reaches of a mountain stream, along which the road continued its more level and straight course. To relieve the effects of the intolerable heat of a midsummer afternoon, not unmindful of the dangers of the swift current, we risked an ice cold bathe under the shadows of one of Tamara's castles—a chain of medieval forts, set up by a queen of Georgia of legendary beauty and wisdom, for protection against the mountaineers. By then we were in Georgia, and reached Tiflis that same night.

We found the Soviet Legation already installed under its Minister, Kyrov—a distinguished younger Party member, who later, when at the head of the Leningrad Soviet, was killed by

a White terrorist, with grave consequences to hundreds of innocent people.

Duly cautioned by the First Secretary about the existence, on the Legation staff, of a "gendarme"—to use Dr. Joffé's expression—in the person of a very young and, according to our informant, ignorant, arrogant and stupid creature, we settled down in a small boarding-house, set aside for our Commission and staff. We, the Delineation Commission, by the way, had our own specimen in our midst and I must, I am afraid, test the credulity of my readers in describing it, or rather, her.

A pretty blonde, of about twenty-five, well dressed and groomed, she had spent part of the German, and the whole of the Civil War as a minor actress in one of those front-line theatrical troupes, not unlike the early ENSA companies of the last war. In the course of this, she had become a party member and now was undergoing the obligatory stage in the Cheka. She was amusing and lively and, as her special duties were not concerned with us but with screening personnel of the Volunteer Army interned in Georgia, a quite agreeable addition to our staff. To me, the oddest thing about her was that, having been born and brought up in Tiflis and with a host of relatives and friends there, she could not make up her mind whether to stay in Georgia for good—leaving the party, of course—or return to Russia. She openly discussed this issue with all and sundry, as well as that of the disposal of a pair of valuable diamond earrings, which she had smuggled out of Russia in her ears.

Our meetings with the Georgian part of the Commission were soon under way and, as per usual, there was very little to do in the Naval line, so that I had ample leisure to enjoy the lively town which the capital of the Georgian Republic was at that time. To meet people, one just had to walk before 11 a.m. along the shady side of the broad pavement of the Boulevard

Rustaveli, the beautiful main thoroughfare, named after a famous native poet of the Middle Ages, lined by innumerable open air cafes: it was the place to be seen and make—the afternoon siesta being inviolable—one's arrangements for the evening and night.

From the first, I was sought out by a few friends and acquaintances from Russia—everything was known in an instant in that gossipy town—who had taken refuge there, and soon introduced to the local society. I was well received, and even fêted, by a number of them—the memory of my uncle, Count Voronzoff-Dashkoff, for years a well-beloved Viceroy, being of great help. Sometimes, it is true, I encountered signs of resistance against my present employ: I would meet, on the boulevard, a Georgian nobleman—most of them in one way or another were princes, and by now always wore their picturesque national costume—drawing his dagger half-way out in passing and glaring fiercely at me. The same thing would sometimes happen in one of the suburban pleasure gardens, in passing the table of a party when, say, on the way to one's own. But so light-hearted and fundamentally amiable was the disposition of these gentlemen that, as often as not, and prompted, perhaps, by one of their ladies curious to have a closer look at a Count posing as a Bolshevik, I would be asked to join them, soon to become fast friends for the night at least.

It was in one of these places, having supper one evening with a recent acquaintance, a charming Armenian war widow, that I was very much surprised to see at another table, a first cousin of mine, Petya Dolgorouki, having supper with an attractive Circassian lady. Delighted to see him, I went over to his table and, without difficulty, persuaded them both to join me at mine. During the meal he told me that he had left the Volunteer Army and had come to Tiflis for a short while on business, on the way to join his family already abroad. He gave me to understand that he would like to meet me alone later in the

evening. Having escorted our partners home after an enjoyable supper, we met again in one of those all-night wine cellars in which the Boulevard Rustaveli also abounded.

In the privacy of this place, at that late hour nearly empty, a quite different and, for me, extremely significant, aspect of Petya's visit transpired. He said he had been trailing me for the last two days, to find an opportunity to make his presence in Tiflis known without compromising me, should I not feel it possible to contact him. I told him I saw no reason to avoid him, whereupon he first of all enquired if I was at present as completely loyal to the Soviet Government as I had been to the Imperial, and with no machinations of my own up my sleeve? I assured him that the former was indeed the case, and stating that he had been sure of it, he proceeded to disclose to me the real reason for his visit to Tiflis.

Our mutual friend, Peter Wrangel, now C.-in-C. of the White Force holding the Crimean Peninsula, by now the last in occupation of Russian soil, had sent Petya to ask me if I would be willing and able to initiate certain negotiations between the Soviet Government and General Wrangel himself. The underlying cause of the White Leader's suggestion and the proposals prompted by it can be summed up as follows: the entirely unwarranted and treacherous Polish attack completely overrode, in the General's opinion, any conflict existing between the White Russian movement and the Soviets. He therefore was prepared to put all his forces at the disposal of the Soviet Government to bring the Polish war to a speedy and victorious end, if a conclusion of the Civil War could be reached by the creation of an autonomous White Russian Republic on the Crimean Peninsula, with General Wrangel at the head of its government.

The negotiations could be started either in the neutral Georgia, by accredited representatives of both parties, or in the Crimea, where the Soviet representatives would be assured of

a complete safe conduct. The latter course was preferable for the preservation of absolute secrecy about the whole matter—as any leakage to the outside world would, in no uncertain manner, affect the General's relations with his western supporters. In both cases, I was to be one of the Soviet representatives.

In spite of a feeling that Oppenheim's ghost was presiding over the whole proceedings and its setting, the matter seemed to me one worthy of serious consideration: all over Russia the Polish aggression had already worked wonders in easing the tension between the Soviet Government and its opponents, manifestly as strongly influenced by the same motives as the White Leader himself. Wrangel's proposition, if accepted by the Soviet Government, had a good chance of becoming a major factor towards the establishment of a lasting peace in the land, and bringing to an end the horrible nightmare of the Civil War.

I therefore told Petya that I, in principle, accepted the mission proposed by him, and arranged to meet him again next evening to keep him abreast of possible developments.

The next morning I told the whole story, first to my Army colleague, and afterwards—together with him—to the Chairman of our Commission. Both had my complete confidence: we had been serving together in the same respective capacities, since the Estonian Delineation Commission, and knew each other intimately and well.

The first was a former Captain of the Guards Artillery, three times wounded in the German war, and with a more than distinguished record of service, which had earned him the St. George's Cross (the Russian equivalent of the V.C.). A staff college graduate, he was a thoughtful, and widely read man, calm and extremely self-possessed—nothing ever seemed to unbalance his judgment. The other was one more typical representative of a pre-revolutionary party member; implicated

while a student at Kiev University in underground activities, he fled abroad, where he managed to graduate at the Sorbonne living from hand to mouth. After that he became a journalist and worked on the staff of some of the revolutionary Russian papers published abroad, mostly in Switzerland. He returned from exile either in the immediate entourage of Lenin, or soon afterwards, and had a good standing in the party. With a general political attitude akin to Dr. Joffé's, he was a man of carefree and debonair disposition, and fond of bourgeois female society, a foible in which he rather indulged in Georgia, thereby, as I discovered later, doing some damage to his own position in the party, and—by repercussion—at one time endangering mine in the Service.

They both agreed that the matter, on the face of it, was worth serious consideration and it was decided for me to meet Petya again, this time in company with my Army colleague. Consequently the same evening a long, serious and most dignified secret conference united us at the same little wine cellar as before, during which the matter was thrashed out by the three of us in all its aspects. The evening nevertheless, concluded in more amusing places and company, in a most convivial way, lasting almost till dawn—a pastime for which Tiflis, I truly believe, stands unsurpassed in the world.

The end of this affair was inconclusive: my Chairman, having taken twenty-four hours for reflection on the joint report of our session, (during which, I have reason to think, he consulted the Minister Kyrov) instructed me to report the whole matter to Behrens by way of special ultra-secret channels, but over my own signature alone. I did not much relish the sole responsibility implied by this last condition but, as there was no way out of it, sent up a long and detailed report—and nothing, just nothing whatever happened, or was ever heard, of the affair forever afterwards.

This fiasco of my one and only occasion to appear on the

wider political scene of the day did not, however, worry me unduly, and a month later, having reported that there was nothing further for me to do in Georgia, I was recalled, and started back to Moscow, very pleased indeed with my interesting summer.

I made my way back entirely by rail, partly because there would have been delay if I had waited for an occasion to go by the Georgian highway, but mostly because I was taking with me two very large—I must confess—boxes, filled with all sorts of delicious foods and beverages no money could buy in Moscow. The goods were well camouflaged, under Genmor's labels, as files on their way to Archives from the naval establishment at the port of Batum. I had a fairly comfortable journey through Baku and, skirting the mountain range along the Caspian shore through the border Cossack country, reached Rostov. Here I had to wait two days to find safe accommodation for my boxes and, for the matter of that, even for myself, in one of the trains to Moscow. To send the precious stuff by freight was unthinkable and even under personal escort it was not advisable to leave the boxes out of sight for more than a few moments—such was the chaos and overcrowding of the trains at that time on the main line from Rostov to Moscow.

The whole of the railway system had been pretty bad in that respect ever since the food shortage had begun in the towns and in the northern part of the country generally, but recently a new plight had become acute. This time it was salt, ordinary cooking salt, that became nearly unobtainable in Moscow and the whole of Central Russia. Morshansk jail had taught me that after a very short while anyone would prefer to starve than to eat unsalted food.

The saltings, along the shores of the Azov Sea near Rostov had always been the main source for the regions I mentioned and they had been cut off for a considerable time by the Civil War Front. The existing stocks having been exhausted and rationing—always shaky in any case—having broken down completely, untold thousands had taken the matter into their own hands and were smothering the main line in both directions.

I shall not attempt to describe the trains on that line at the time: suffice to say that, apart from engines appearing like enormous clusters of rugged shapes of quite incredible contours and not to mention packed roofs, I have seen people travelling suspended in improvised rope nets or hammocks slung *under* the cars.

I was, under these circumstances, lucky in obtaining a seat for myself and stowage for my boxes, in a carriage reserved for the exclusive use of a small escort of soldiers, which in those days travelled with most trains to assist the railway police. The sergeant in charge of one of such escorts having been good enough to assist me while I bartered a few of my possessions for salt in a dark corner of the vast waiting room at Rostov's main station, was easily persuaded that my official mission entitled me to a seat in his car: a few of my dry and liquid goods by which he and his men were favoured seemed an insignificant price to pay for such a satisfactory way out of my predicament.

My escort and I were about the only passengers who travelled comfortably in the living hell of that so-called Southern Express, which took an interminable ten days to reach Moscow, instead of the normal thirty-two hours. But in one way the journey proved to be amusing and interesting, and that owing to a pretty little peasant girl of not more than eight to ten years of age: she had lost her mother and elder sister, with whom she had come south after salt from their small village

not far from Moscow, and was brought to us by the railway police as a "stray", soon after our train left Rostov.

What a charmer Alenka was—Elena Gregorievna Lebedeva, of the village of Stassovo of the Rezan District and Province—as she sedately introduced herself. Dark, with a healthy sunburned complexion, sharp greenish grey eyes, she gravely appeared before us, tidily dressed in a shirt and skirt which unmistakably proclaimed her native province, with a short, virginal pigtail bound, alas, with twine, peeping from under a coloured kerchief. Her belongings consisted of a small canvas bag, with a change of clothes in it, and—a large shiny belt clasp, adorned by the Imperial Eagle, which had been part of the Foot Guards' full dress equipment a generation before.

She established herself quite calmly, and as of right, behind an improvised curtain, hung for her by the soldiers in the corner of the one of the four compartments occupied by the sergeant and myself, and became at once a part of our life, making herself useful by helping and presiding at our meals and interminable tea. But there soon appeared another reason that increased, if possible, her popularity amongst us, and made her the chief interest of our journey: soon after joining us, she very seriously asked the sergeant and myself if we were sure that the heavy clasp was really of brass (a metal much sought after by the black market)? On being assured by us that it was she seemed delighted, but let the matter rest. At our next stop, a little wayside station standing forlorn amidst the immensity of the sunburned Cossack Steppes, she disappeared and, having made us rather anxious, turned up just before the train was about to start after a so-called short stop of only two hours. Very pleased with herself she showed us a medium sized, shabby doll which, nevertheless, was still able to produce the required sounds and tempting glances and—a small canvas bag containing a pound of salt.

She played cosily with the doll for the remainder of the

evening and put it to bed behind her curtain. The next morning she disappeared again, this time at an important junction surrounded by a whole camp of salt seekers, and taking the doll with her. When she came back the doll had gone, but instead she had a piece of material and a little more salt, which was added to the bag.

The sergeant, experienced in all the wiles of black marketeers, and beginning to suspect what was afoot, asked her about the clasp: she laughed delightedly and said that she had got the doll and the salt in exchange for it. All became clear and she the centre of delighted interest to our carriage. All along the route she continued her operations, every time returning with more salt in addition to some article of black-market value. One of them was truly surprising: it was a beautifully bound volume uniting fifty-two numbers of the illustrated *Niva* of the year 1910, a weekly famous for years throughout the countryside before the revolution. It was inscribed inside by its late owner, a Cossack village schoolmaster, rightly proud of the binding—the work of his own hands.

We took the keenest interest (the soldiers even trying to help by drumming up customers) in her trading and were immensely proud of her: these feelings of which she was quite cognisant, were graciously accepted and rewarded by embraces and kisses accorded indiscriminately in her mixture of delightful little girl and shrewd business woman, already quite prepared to use all the wiles of a future siren of the most fatal kind.

We delivered her safely into the hands of the station-master of a wayside whistle stop who, already forewarned by the ubiquitous railway telegraph, assured us that she would the same day rejoin her village home not a mile away.

She parted from us by first solemnly shaking each by the hand and then jumping up to kiss us on both cheeks, not without a few silent tears. She disappeared from our view, standing

on the platform frantically waving goodbye, with her other hand on the little bag, now replete with about fifteen pounds of the best rock salt the Azov Sea could produce. Did she, I sometimes wonder, find her mother and sister already at home, did they rejoin her later on, or—there was a very real danger for those who undertook these perilous journeys—did they never come back at all, leaving her alone to look after her father.

I was very much gratified on my return by my reception at the Genmor: in my absence which had virtually lasted just half a year, I had progressed up the ladder of promotion at a rate that should make every climber in the Service green with envy.

I was to organise a new department by uniting three existing subdivisions all dealing with naval intelligence of the sort that any Naval Attaché is legitimately supposed to collect in a foreign country. We had nothing to do with secret agents' counter-espionage—only the results of these operations would sometimes reach the department—in those days such matters were in the hands of party members to the exclusion of the regular personnel of the Service.

I went back to my rooms at the Ilyinskis and, provided with interesting work, well paid both in money and in rations, easily resumed my agreeable social life—the contents of my boxes having a marked effect on the increase of my popularity amongst my friends.

Such was the state of my affairs when one night, in mid-October, I was arrested at home on a warrant of the Cheka. After about three days at various sorting places of the kind previously described during the ludicrous schoolboy conspiracy, I at last landed in what was officially known as the "Inner Prison" of the Cheka, occupying in the centre of Moscow next door to the Kremlin, a block of offices formerly belonging to one of the largest insurance companies.

No book about Soviet Russia seems to be complete without a description of horrors in that country's places of detention, but I feel it my duty to warn my readers that I experienced, or witnessed, none at all, during the many months of my imprisonment. On the contrary, I have to consider this period of my enforced close proximity and intercourse with people, not only from my own country but from nearly all over the world, as one of the most interesting and instructive I have experienced in all my life. To bring this home I propose to describe my detention in some detail.

The causes of my arrest remain obscure to this day. Comparing notes during the days of preliminary sorting with several of my colleagues from Genmor, arrested the same night, we soon came to the conclusion that we were the victims of one of those screening operations in which Security Services seemed to indulge in those days. We ourselves, at Genmor, had witnessed similar occurrences at other institutions, and had always patted ourselves on the back with a feeling of complete security behind the broad shoulders of our Chief of Staff. This, though tentative, conclusion, helped us not to be unduly worried about our prospects.

As far as I can see now, we were right: to anticipate, I may say here that no harm befell my colleagues and they were all released without a stain on their careers, after a fortnight to two months' detention. That mine lasted so much longer could be perhaps explained by the fact that I was, by now, by far the senior executive officer amongst the arrested and warranted, therefore, a closer and more extensive investigation.

The Inner Prison, where I spent on that occasion, about two months, was, at last, what a Secret Service place should be, with none of the free and easy atmosphere characteristic of the sorting depots and the Butirsky Jail. We were kept absolutely *incomunicado* in groups of two to six inmates, in small offices

of the insurance company giving out on to the inner courts of the block. The isolation was kept up so rigidly that no two people connected in one affair were ever put together in the same room—I, for instance, never saw any of my colleagues again in prison after we had parted at the depot. The result was that cellmates were entirely unknown to one another and, fear of stool pigeons never for a moment absent in such places, people did not talk to each other or if they did, on indifferent subjects only. I have been with men who did not open their mouths for days, even to give the rest of us an inkling of what had passed, favourable or otherwise, at an interrogation. This would have been the only subject which usage amongst prisoners accepted not only as admissible but considered *de bon ton*.

The routine was strict indeed: locked up the whole time, we were escorted, by separate cells, to the washrooms every morning under constant supervision. My cell was allowed no exercise the whole time I was there, though I did occasionally see in the courtyard a solitary group from other cells. There was a spring cot for each prisoner, with good blankets and pillow provided, and sheets from home; the food, brought three times a day always accompanied by tea, was adequate. Cutlery was provided too, and food parcels permitted once a week.

The warders were extremely silent and spoke only to issue curt and abrupt orders. Every morning at 10 a.m., the Chief Warder would come in to enquire about requests or complaints. He was a colossal creature, with Guards Sergeant-Major (which he had been) written all over him. Out of a stony, absolutely impassible face two cold grey eyes would fix you for a moment when accepting your written or oral complaint or request, and he would give his decision in as few precise words as possible, or say: "Has to go up. Decision tomorrow."—a promise which he invariably kept. He looked, and possibly was, a terror, and it was said of him, in an awe-

struck whisper, that he was the chief executioner, at work every night in the cellars below. But I have no proof either for or against this theory.

I met him again a few years later, just before I left for England: he was coming along the pavement, staring in front of him with what seemed unseeing eyes, and dressed in cavalry uniform. Drawing level with me he suddenly saluted, stopped and proffered his hand: "Out of service, I see", he said, and on my confirming this and adding that I had become a musician: "Pity," he said "we always need people like you." "But how do you know about me?" "Oh, things get around . . ." My further questions elicited that he had, thank goodness, been out of the Inner Prison for some time, was back in the Army and on his way to take over a cavalry troop in the Far East. All this without a shadow of a smile on the same stony face by which I remembered him. We parted with mutual good wishes, and I never saw him again.

During my time at the Inner Prison I had three interrogations, which all took place during the day in the front offices, looking out on to the street below. One was conducted to these by a messenger following one through the corridors, and up and down the stairs, pointing a revolver at one's back, murmuring short words of command to guide the way. At the doors, guarded by an armed sentry, the escort pinned one against the wall and exchanged two whispered words with the sentry, after which the doors were unlocked. All this, by the way, was the ideal, not always strictly observed and subject to minor relaxations: the revolver would go back to its holster as soon as we were on the way, or not be produced at all; the sentry would say from afar: "come along, don't bother", and so on. In general, such insignificant simplifications often occurred in matters of daily routine—by, at least, the lower personnel. I can hardly imagine it otherwise with a Russian staff.

The first interrogation took place three weeks after my arrest. In a medium-sized room, filled with cupboards and files, two young men sat, at desks in opposite corners. One of them, having signed for me and dismissed the escort, asked me to sit down at his table and tell him about my service abroad, and the people I had met there. I gave him about the same amount of information my readers have had occasion to peruse in the preceding pages, but left out the General Wrangel episode. On his remarking, in a disappointed tone if that was all, I said: "No, there was also a top-secret affair, but I could not possibly confide it to you without a written order from my direct superior, in this case the Naval Chief of Staff." They both seemed mildly surprised at this statement—the other had come up to listen in—they worked in pairs like the gendarmes and, I am told, the Jesuits.

"I suppose he is right," my questioner said, glancing interrogatively at his colleague, "what about doing it through the proper channels?"

"Ah," I thought, "I've got them on the run," and proceeded to the attack myself.

"Don't you think," I said, "that it is very detrimental to the Service for a responsible executive to be kept in complete idleness for weeks?"

More mild astonishment on their part, and after a duet of the usual complaints about the difficulties of their task, and assurances that I would soon be able to return to my duties, the interrogation was closed, a short statement signed of which I was given a copy, and I was returned to my cell. It all lasted three-quarters of an hour at most.

The other two interrogations were at a week's interval from each other in the next month, and were even more futile in substance and execution. At the first, a shy middle-aged man, introducing himself as a former officer of the U.S.A. Merchant Marine, inquired if I spoke English. On my affirmation

the conversation thereafter proceeded in that language; on his side, I should say, in American flavoured by a strong Russian accent.

On his initiative the delights and dangers of the China coast and the Pacific generally were discussed by us, in English, at some length, before we got to the gist of the matter. Apparently the Cheka had information that I had been seen, some time previously, at Shanghai representing the White leader, Admiral Kolchak, in his negotiations with the British (hence the conversation on the Pacific and the English language employed). I replied that the Sosnofka soviet could inform his superiors of my whereabouts at the relevant time and that would give sufficient proof that the person on Kolchak's staff, whoever he was, could not have been me. This brought the interrogation to a conclusion satisfactory to both sides. My interrogator was one more curious example of a self-exiled young Russian, making a living by roving the seven seas till the hour of the fulfilment of his revolutionary dream when he returned to take his share of its burdens and triumphs.

My third and last interrogation, by two other young men exactly similar to the first, consisted in a query if I had known a certain X (I've forgotten his name), and what relations I had had with him since the advent of the Soviet régime. I answered that we had both been prominent members of the local government of our two adjoining provinces, and knew each other well before the war, but that I had not seen, or had any communication with, him since. My questioners made me put all this down on paper and, apparently satisfied with the results of their labours, sent me back to my cell.

Some time later I met X in Moscow, and in comparing notes about our life under the present régime, we discovered that he, being interrogated for one reason or another by his local Cheka, had been asked about me and my activities at Sosnofka. From this I concluded that my investigators were showing glimmers

of reason in their madness—but why the interminable time taken to come to a conclusion?

For it took another five months to complete my screening, and these were spent at the Butirsky Jail. Before I come to this period, I shall, to finish with the Inner Prison to which I went back for a week, take up the last few days before my final release, there to be informed of the satisfactory conclusion of the investigation.

On this occasion I came to a cell containing a curiously assorted pair—a well-known monarchist member of the late Duma and a left-wing social revolutionary who had been Public Prosecutor at Admiral Kolchak's trial at Irkutsk. Both these elderly gentlemen got along perfectly together: their total rejection of the current régime was no less complete than the divergence of their political views.

Being at last summoned, I found myself in the presence of a young man in the uniform of a midshipman. He started the interview by saying, that as a graduate of the Petrograd Law School it would be easy for people like us, who used the same idiom, to get together and see things eye to eye. I must explain that this highly privileged school he mentioned was one of the few in Russia run on the lines of an English public school, with the difference that they had three years additional education at a university level—certainly the last place in the world where one would expect to find a Bolshevik.

He then stressed the extremely satisfactory results of my investigation which, according to him, was well worth the months spent over it. The original uneasiness on their part was aroused by a report on me, as well as on my chairman of the Frontier Delineation Commission, from their agent attached to the Legation, (the skunk indicated to us at the time by its First Secretary), but not only was I completely cleared but found to be the right man in the right place: "How much more

efficiently," he went on, "and with less delay could our task be accomplished if people in your position would care directly to assist us—if only from time to time . . .?"

The bad smell produced by this observation being quite unmistakable and more than I could bear, I firmly interrupted him and said that the Service regulations provided for proper channels in every emergency and that I absolutely declined to use any others and, what is more, that I was rather astonished that he, a Naval man himself, could have entertained any hopes of a different attitude on my part.

He stopped my harangue by raising his hands defensively and explaining: "All right, all right—not a word more about it, but look!" He showed me a small blueprint with the contours of a shoreline, dotted by symbols indicating a minefield. "We have found this on an enemy agent. How are we to know from which of our staffs . . .?"

"It's you people who are responsible for Counter-Intelligence," I snapped at him, "and ought to know better than to ask me such questions—and, once more, nothing doing, without a written order through proper channels."

This time he laughed and abandoned the subject. To me the funny part was that the blueprint was a clumsy fake, as I could see at a glance. It could have been intended as a sort of test for me, but the question remained in my mind: was the blueprint concocted for that purpose by the fertile imagination of the Cheka itself, or had it been really passed on to an enemy agent, successfully and profitably and without possible harm, by somebody on our side?

A few moments later the interview was concluded by my liberation order being handed to me and an hour later, having collected my things from the cell, I walked out of the Inner Prison to resume my naval duties next morning.

But to return to the Butirsky Jail, where I had yet to wait so long for that happy day.

The Butirsky, the former transit depot for convicts from all over Central Russia and accommodating up to 3,000 men and women, consisted of four blocks built round the sides of a square serving as main exercise grounds. After passing the main gate and the guard of soldiers of the Moscow garrison in charge of it, you became, whatever your provenance, the responsibility of the prison authorities proper. They took full charge of all criminals, convicts or remanded. But with regard to "politicals" of all kinds, the Warden by custom delegated most of his authority to personnel elected by the prisoners from amongst themselves.

This system, taken over from the old régime, when it was applied to the comparatively small numbers of active revolutionaries, now embraced in addition the enormous heterogeneous crowd of black-market offenders, to the exclusion however, as I mentioned before, of "bandits," who came in the criminal class.

The prisoners of each cell elected a Cell Foreman, who was responsible for general order and kept the rota for cleaners and supervised their activities. He reported every morning to the Clerk of the Block on the number of vacant places in his cell and brought in all prisoners' written requests and complaints. The Cell Foremen elected from their midst the Clerk of the Block and this dignitary had the following duties, rights and privileges.

1. To him, through the Chief Warder of the Block, all administrative orders were transmitted and he was responsible for their execution.

2. He received and placed prisoners on arrival, and superintended their release—an important and ticklish duty as cases were frequent of a released prisoner trying to get away with somebody else's belongings.

3. He reported the results of the Block roll call to the Main Gate every evening. These reports, added together, had to

check with a general register kept by the guard in charge of the Gate. In that connection I—by that time an experienced Clerk myself—had to pass a very disturbing night. One evening, the total number reported by the Blocks, was—I remember it even now—2505, whereas the Gate Register stated 2506.

Consternation: one male (the Register said so) prisoner was missing. Indescribable uproar and confusion. The clamour of the jail-break alarm shattered our ears; the guard sprang to arms, interpreting this as mass jail-break or mutiny; the assembled Chief Warders and Block Clerks were cursed up hill and down dale by the Warden (and no wonder, as no prisoner, within the memory of man, had ever escaped from the Butirsky jail) and sent hot foot to lock and double-lock their charges, and to check them again and again to find out, first of all, *who the escapee was*.

This went on for hour after hour, till everyone's nerves were reduced to such a state that a mutiny of the most reckless kind was really threatening, when at last about 4 a.m. an unknown genius at the Main Gate discovered the cause of all this *tomasha*. It proved to be so small that it had not yet left its mother's arms.

Apparently a woman with a male baby had been admitted that morning and been duly registered by the Guard as "female one; male, one." The Guard as usual changed at mid-day, and when the woman, released, as it happened, the same afternoon, was leaving, the new guard, feeling it, no doubt below their dignity to bother about a babe at its mother's breast, did not mention him or it at all in the Register. As a result "one male" remained on the Register, but had, in fact, left the Prison.

Peace returned as if by magic and I shall never forget the feeling of relief with which I and my assistants drank the health of the said genius at the Main Gate in a glass of superlative brandy, accompanied by suitable goose-liver patés, and smoked salmon sandwiches. The provenance of the items which com-

posed this excellent, if late, supper brings me, quite naturally, to the next points, 4 and 5, concerning the privileges of a Block Clerk.

All home parcels, sent once a week as a rule, were distributed to the cells by the Block Clerk's office, which also levied a certain quota from each for deserving prisoners who, for one reason or another, received none. There were, attached to the supervision of home parcels, certain customary and, on the face of it, voluntary gifts due to the Block Clerk himself. The chief contributors were, of course, important black-market operators rich in Moscow, as all over the world, in the choicest and most luxurious delicacies imaginable. Sometimes they would feel, alas, an element of slight pressure from the Block Clerk, who would perhaps be specially attracted by one article or another. It must not be forgotten that in the matter of choice of cell and the company they therefore would be able to keep, those worthy capitalists were entirely in the hands of the Block Clerks.

The brandy which we had that evening was, I must confess, a shameless perk which was levied by me from its owner, a leviathan amongst his brethren of the black-market, for appointing him as a Block Clerk's office messenger: the right to do so was provided by point 6 of our constitution.

Here it is perhaps timely to mention that all these perquisites had to be handled with circumspection and care. Our posts did not depend, it is true, on any authorities' approval, but it was equally true that in our super-democracy the small body of Cell Foremen could get rid of us at any moment by a simple kick in the pants. I owed my own election to a case of this kind, when pilfering of parcels by my predecessor was suspected, exactly one month after I entered the Siberia Block¹ where I was interned the day I arrived.

Under point 7, we were the only inmates of the prison who had the privilege of wearing convict's uniform, not only as a

¹One of the four main blocks, formerly used for convicts in transit to Siberia.

distinguishing mark but also to save our own clothes. These uniforms were smartly adjusted to fit, and cleaned, at the prison tailoring and maintenance workshops, which owing to their female convict personnel, were always referred to by a well-known expression, of Italian origin and, I am afraid,—not without sufficient grounds.

We also carried as a badge of office an enormous key, which opened all doors except the main gate (point 8).

These duties and activities made for a full working day and gave a Block Clerk the opportunity of getting to know, sometimes quite intimately, the fleeting population of his area—a day full of various small adventures into the world of human miseries and joys, difficult to match in any other occupation, always interesting and sometimes very amusing.

But now we come to point 9, which concerned a duty quite different and always disturbing. From time to time, and not too seldom either, a man would come forward at the cell roll call, and the following conversation ensue.

Prisoner: "Hunger strike."

Block Clerk: "Wet or dry?" (Starving, as the case may be, with drinking water, or without?)

"Whose remand?"

"Cheka of X," or "Public Prosecutor X" or "X Police."

The prisoner would then be taken to one of two cells, wet or dry, set aside in every Block for that purpose, and the authority stipulated in the second answer notified through the Warden.

Those people were a terrible responsibility to the Block Clerks: although one wanted to help them in their revolt against the universal interminable delays, used perhaps, one suspected, in some cases to soften up and to reduce the resistance of suspects, one had to be careful, especially with the "dry" cases, not to let the matter go too far, to avoid permanent injury to their health. In appropriate cases the Prison

Doctor would be called in, to decide on and, when necessary, apply artificial feeding. Although, as practice showed, two days of "dry" and a little more of "wet" starvation would bring the authorities round in a hurry, cases were not unknown when, for example, a hitch occurred in the transmission of the notification, artificial feeding alone saved the prisoner's life.

It can readily be understood that the Prison Administration was only too ready and glad to discharge the grave responsibility the hunger-strikers brought with them on to the shoulders of the elected representatives of the prisoners themselves.

The fact that this habit or custom—I don't quite know which word to use—had become such a routine institution was in itself a constant reminder to everyone of the terrible uncertainties and tribulations inherent in the birth of a new society from the wreckage of the old way of life. Hidden behind the screen, as it were, of a callous devil-may-care attitude, this major and universal preoccupation was never far from the minds of the community of prisoners.

What an incredibly mixed lot those detainees of mine were! Most of them were black-marketeers from all strata of Moscow's population. Of such were the two elegant young playboys, belonging to the cream of the town's industrial *beau monde*, who, though condemned to death by the regular courts for some quite extravagant black-market operation, were, nevertheless, leading a gay and carefree existence, confident that the good graces of Comrade Enukidze, an influential member of the Central Committee of the Party, and well known for his kind and generous heart, would bring them a reprieve. They were right—it came in my time, and they were even permitted to start their life sentence in our midst in the same comfortable conditions.

One of them being the head of an important soap factory, their hobby was making soap from bits of grease collected from all over the prison through a network of stooges, and

some acid smuggled in home parcels; the necessary heat being obtained from an illegal electric stove, self-made and connected with the electric main somewhere in the workshops. The product was quite good quality soap, but the perfume they used to scent it—abominable. When I left Butirsky Jail for the last time they were still there, as confident this time of a full pardon, as they had been of a reprieve before. I somehow feel sure that they got it in the end.

But not all was comic relief, so let us look at the other side. One of our inmates was the former General Gutor, in the German war the last C.-in-C. on the Southern Front, now about a week with us, for reasons neither he nor apparently anyone else knew. One morning I saw him standing in front of an improvised blackboard giving, it seemed, a lecture to a group of soldiers sitting about on the neighbouring cots. Intrigued, I joined the group: General Gutor was indeed doing so—on combat tactics, illustrated by his own experiences as, in succession Divisional, Corps, and Front Commander. Being a gunner himself, he did this with particular regard to his own branch to an audience who mostly were gunnery N.C.O.s and bombardiers themselves.

This particular group of soldiers were all chairmen of their respective village soviets and had been brought to Moscow in connection with local peasant resistance to the demands of the District soviets. They were Bashkir—a small nationality of Tartar race, and Mahommedan religion, which inhabited the western slopes of the Ural mountains. Completely and peacefully Russianised for many generations they still preserved the Tartar language much like the Irish or Welsh keep Gaelic alive. With no separatist leanings at all, the trouble they were involved in was partly due to the fact that they refused to accept a special national status which the new régime was trying to foist on them. Very intelligent and fairly well educated, as their appreciation of the General's by no means elementary lectures

showed, they seemed to me an apt example to modify the generally accepted view of the oppression of minorities as characteristic of the old régime in Russia.

There appeared one day in my Block an unexpected throw-back to my boyhood in Sosnofka. For several summers there my brother and I had been coached in high school mathematics by a science student from Petrograd University, who stayed with us during his own vacations. He had now for years been headmaster of a high school in a small town, and had been arrested after some trouble with his school board, which accused him of giving preferential treatment to bourgeois elements among his pupils. I am happy to say that within a week he was cleared and released.

Quite a number of teachers came under my observation, all of them locally accused more or less of the same thing as my late tutor. And as they were all cleared in the same satisfactory way, it soon became obvious to me that their transfer to Moscow was really done to get them out of the hands of the local Cheka, and to settle the matter on general principles without, at the same time, impairing the authority of the local branch in the eyes of the population. Another example of the confused procedure which, without any regard for consequences, took no account whatsoever of time and work lost, while acting with the best intentions to prevent needless trouble and friction.

But not always were the results of such dilatoriness so un-harmful. The price paid, in physical and mental misery and degradation, by a group of sailors, both officers and ratings, who were amongst my charges, goes beyond description. They had been accused of sabotaging their river gunboats, wrecking them intentionally on the sandbanks of the northern Dvina, on the northern Civil War front, held against a combined Anglo-White force based at Archangel. They came in about 3 a.m. one night: twenty men in dirty rags, hardly recognisable as

uniform and infested with lice. All with drawn and haggard faces, some unable to stand up without support, obviously at the very end of their forces from sheer exhaustion, caused by hunger and sleepless nights in overcrowded conditions. They had been kept for months in small provincial jails—similar to the one at Morshansk, no doubt—in a part of the country where the food shortage was at its most acute. Some of them had, according to their senior officer, to be left behind *en route* in a dying condition.

All this entirely for nothing, and owing solely to lack of organisation; proved by the fact, as I was able to verify later at the Genmor, that not only were they all cleared of the alleged treasonable action, but their Political Commissars were dismissed and punished in consequence.

But the most tragic case that came to my knowledge was that of a Lieut.-Colonel of the White Russian Ural Cossacks who, as I arrived, had been in Butirsky for months and whom I left there when I was released. He had been so gravely implicated, as he told me himself, in the trial and execution of a number of Red Commissars taken prisoner by the British forces in Baku and handed over to the White Command in Turkestan, that he had been in turn, with other White Russian officers, condemned to death himself by a Red Army tribunal. He, condemned in absentia, had not been executed with all his comrades in the case, but arrested later and for some unknown reason brought to Moscow and obviously forgotten. A middle-aged bearded man with barely anything but the tidy and much mended clothes on his back, and nobody, of course, to supply him with food parcels, he went about a silent and dignified figure, cobbling shoes for a small fee of victuals or tobacco. To the few people in the know about his situation, who tried to comfort him about his future he would gravely say: "No fear, they'll find me some time . . . Somebody is too lazy to get busy

about it" . . . I am afraid that he, too, was in the end proved right, but when this happened I don't know.

He, and the large and small parties of peasants from all quarters of the sun who, anything but anxious or cowed but in an embittered raging hate against everybody and everything—so much as to become a constant threat to peace—formed, in their endless chain, the sombre background of the picture of Russia in those days as I saw it then in prison and as it has remained with me for ever.

I have only a few more words to say about the Butirsky, and these about my foreign charges. They seemed to indicate that a certain confusion was the rule, not only in our national revolution, but that the international world revolution was in no better way. I had considerable intercourse with our foreigners—I was one of the few who spoke some of their languages fluently. Moreover as my present position as Block Clerk contrasted with my past in recent and more remote days, I was an object of flattering curiosity and attention to these staunch revolutionaries.

There were, to begin with, two young German sociology dons from Berlin University, who had come to Russia to gather material for a book on the revolution. They were both Spartacists (the German equivalent to Bolshevik) and had been received with open arms and helped in every way. But when they asked for their visas to go home, having presented their assembled material for appreciation to the proper authorities, interminable delays started. At last, losing patience, they tried to get away across the Finnish border, were caught and had since been with us for some time.

Stout Spartacists that they were, they, in the German fashion, apparently had not lost their respect for the war idol of Germany, Marshal Hindenburg—as the following conversation should show: "Tell us, Herr von Benckendorff, what you carry on your armorials?"

Entering into their spirit and rather flattered, I answered that two roses added in the thirteenth century, drawn by a Danish king in my ancestor's blood as a reward for two wounds sustained valorously in battle, made the present number three on a field of gold and azure.

"I thought so," one of them said, turning to the other, "same as the old Marshal's—remember the soldier's song *Drei Roeschen in dem Wappen* (Three roses in his crest)," and then, turning to me: "You see, the old Herr is a Benckendorff too."

That was the first I had ever heard of it, and it was a great surprise to me. Afterwards I found out that Hindenburg's second surname was Benckendorff: it had been added, sometime in the past I think, in consequence of an inheritance or marriage settlement tied to that condition. His branch had stayed in Germany, while ours migrated for good to Esthonia in the early sixteenth century.

Quite different was Mr. Zukor, a Chicago leader of the spearhead of the International in the U.S.A., the Workers of the World (W. W.). In his long career as such—and he was a middle-aged man—he had spent eight years all told in American jails, finally to land in ours. As far as I could make out, the reason was that he had severely criticised our people for being too busy with their own country: "It's not worth the bother now—everything will come right the moment we are on top in the old U.S.A.: that's what we have to press for now", as he put it to me. He was quite bewildered by things Russian: "Don't tell me" he exclaimed, having discovered Gutor lecturing to the Bashkirs, "that the old pop is a Tsarist general, lecturing common enlisted men? Why have a revolution then?" And he left me, shaking his head in grave perplexity.

But a rare nuisance Dulecp Singh, the Sikh emissary, became in time. He was with us for intriguing against his Mahomedan counterpart, who at the moment had the upper hand. "But not for long, not for long," Dulecp Singh used to say

shaking his head with a fanatical gleam in his eye. After becoming fairly intimate with me, he used to proclaim that he saw me as the certain future leader of all Russias, to which I could not but promise him the same with regard to India. We spent interminable hours in patting ourselves on the back in the course of our philosophical, not untinged with mysticism, appreciation of our countries.

As my time in jail was drawing to its close I heard that a further advancement was contemplated for me at Genmor, if and when I should be able to take up my duties there again. Even still in jail I had one or two interviews with my assistants to discuss certain organisational schemes with regard to the new Information Department I mentioned before.

And so it came about that by the time I was released the said sections had become a Department with a third Assistant Chief of Staff at its head and I was promoted to this position and took it up immediately. The Department now included the Admiralty Library—a depository of general information on naval matters difficult to match anywhere in the world, and dating back to the founder of the Russian Navy—need I tell my readers who that was!

The man who had been at the head of this Library and to whom I had to find a successor, had died while I was in prison. He was the former Rear-Admiral *à la suite* of the Emperor, Count Hayden, who, appointed Chief Admiralty Librarian in the early days of the revolution, had been there ever since and had migrated, with the modern part of the library, to Moscow. Through all this time he was able to pursue his duties entirely undisturbed in spite of the fact that his former position should have made this extremely unlikely. He was buried, with full

naval honours due to his rank, in one of Moscow's oldest cemeteries, and so the man who had served all his life under the blue St. Andrew's Cross of the Imperial Navy went to his last rest in a coffin draped with the Red Flag of the U.S.S.R.

It was a similar peaceful existence and end in the distant future that I felt entitled to expect from now on. Apart from the interesting work in hand, which brought me in close touch not only with similar departments of the land forces, but also with other big administrative organisations, I could confidently look forward to appointments abroad, either as Naval Attaché to one of the great powers, or as Naval Representative to international conferences,—all of these in the offing as Russia's foreign relations were gradually settling down. On the other hand, as future screenings were not entirely to be lost sight of, I had in that case too an interesting and comfortable niche to look forward to as a more or less foregone conclusion.

In fact I found myself happy and contented after what must be qualified as a meteoric career, and had reached the kind of position and environment I had been trying to achieve all my public life; so all was right with the world as far as I personally was concerned.

If that was so for me, for the country as a whole it was at that time the exact contrary. The worst famine in generations, giving rise to, and followed by, an unprecedented typhus epidemic, had overtaken the land, and by late spring of that year the combined effects of these two scourges were on the verge of paralysing completely the vital efforts of the nation as a whole.

The disaster was caused just as much by the total failure of two harvests in one of the country's main granaries—the fertile lands behind the Volga—and very poor ones over the rest of Russia, as by the disruption caused by the Civil War, and the breakdown, total in extreme cases, of transport of every kind both overland and waterborne. In the whole south-east even

natural pastures were affected, and over a considerable part of the country the wholesale extermination of livestock had become an accomplished fact.

But even so it was not the famine but the epidemic that claimed the largest number of victims. The spread of the disease was linked to the other scourge by one simple fact: the lack of any kind of fats for the production of soap. To realise the importance of this fact it must be borne in mind that the carriers of this particular typhus were clothes-lice, who themselves spread to humans from their omnipresent hosts, the rats. The incubation of the lice larvae being about ten days, weekly laundering of underclothes easily and conclusively deals with them. But if such a disinfection is omitted, the spread of lice becomes irresistible, as for instance prolonged trench warfare, all over the world, had shown only too conclusively.

To sum up: it can be said that the famine of these years combined with the epidemic, were to cost Russia uncounted millions of lives, overshadowing by far the grave and disruptive consequences of the German and Civil Wars combined. This crowning disaster gave a strong impulse to both the Soviet Government and the remnants of the *Zemstvo* to join forces—as it proved for the last time.

It was, I believe, due to the initiative of a group led by Kamenef, then a prominent member of the Politburo, on the Government side, and of the well-known Co-operative leaders Prokopovich and Mme. Kuskova, on that of the *Zemstvo*, that the "All Russian Committee for Famine Relief" (to give it its official name) came into being.

This Committee had a membership of equal numbers, nominated on the Government side by the Party, and by co-option by the Prokopovich-Kuskova group. With as Chairman the aforesaid Comrade Kamenef, it had fairly wide powers. The subject which was, right from the beginning, very much to the fore in the minds of the Committee was the pos-

sibility of obtaining substantial help from abroad. An early resolution created a foreign delegation of fifteen members, seven of these to represent the Zemstvo and including the Co-operators Prokopovich and Kuskova and the speaker of the last Duma, F. Golovkin, a member of the Octobrist (i.e. progressive conservative party); the other members from the Zemstvo who were to make up the remaining four were to be co-opted by them.

And in doing so they crossed my path and, once more, my course was disturbed and this time, alas, for good.

I was just leaving in excellent spirits for one of my favourite ballets at the Bolshoi Theatre, when two strangers called on me unexpectedly: they introduced themselves as Prokopovich and Mme. Kuskova—I knew of them, of course, but had never met them before. He, an elderly bearded don, modestly took a seat in the corner, while she, an energetic, forthright and domineering middle-aged lady, armed strangely enough with a lorgnette, took entire charge of the ensuing conversation. (Prokukish, the combined names of this odd couple, soon became the somewhat derisive term by which our committee was known and was to be remembered after its demise. The second half "*kukish*" means, to the Russian schoolboy, a combination of fingers equivalent, I fancy, to the English "nuts.")

Without preliminaries this good lady informed me that the committee had been looking for a secretary to its foreign delegation, and in doing so, had arrived at the unanimous conclusion that I, well known in the Zemstvo, and with invaluable connections abroad, was the obvious—in fact, the only possible—choice. She took upon herself to thank me in anticipation of my consent and to co-opt me as a full member of the delegation and its secretary.

Full of the gloomiest forebodings, for nearly two hours I resisted desperately, bringing up every conceivable objection that came to my mind. But all of no avail against the onslaught

of the indomitable Mrs. Kuskova: in the end I had to give in so far as I declared myself prepared to serve if—by an express order to that effect—I should be temporarily seconded from the Navy. I hoped, secretly, to be able to stiffen Behrens' resistance to the project sufficiently to let the danger pass.

But, of course, for this once, no delay or confusion of any kind: early next morning, and still in bed, I received the order from Behrens himself over the telephone: he being adamant about it and only slightly gilding the pill by promising to keep my place warm for me until my return from abroad.

My forebodings were mainly caused by the feeling that, except for the Co-operators, whose movement had still some cohesion, the other public bodies represented on the delegation were so out of touch with the population and, above all, so easily linked abroad with the White Movement, that no practical good would ever come from the whole enterprise, however well meant. And what we were mainly after—the Imperial Gold Reserve, still in the hands of Baring Bros., the city bankers, who since the eighteenth century had handled the affairs of the Russian Government abroad—would never be transferred to us; the Allies, in my opinion, would be afraid of risking this considerable sum to our Committee's politically feeble hands.

At first I took up my new position without entirely abandoning work at Genmor. Our delegation was not due to depart for some time, and all I had to do as its secretary was to supervise the translation into English and French of various pamphlets dealing with the famine and epidemic, which the delegation were supposed to take abroad with them. Another of my duties was to collect data for our foreign passports, which caused some delay. With the exception of our Chairman and the Co-operators (they were married, by the way, as I discovered—I should have guessed that, observing their respective behaviour during the first interview), the other four members—two from

the late Duma, and two Zemstvo men from the stricken regions, were still on their way to Moscow, but had not yet arrived.

The government side of the delegation I never met at all—they seemed to be kept quite separate from us, and this applied to the Committee as a whole too. The Zemstvo part met by itself in a school building in the Arbat, not far from my friend Vera's house, and there too nobody seemed to know who the government people were, where they met or what they did. All this seemed, from the organisational point of view, rather shaky and not well thought out, to say the least.

The Famine Committee met nearly every day to listen to reports from provincial Zemstvo and Co-operatives, sent or arriving on their own initiative; on the strength of their requests, resolutions were passed establishing the priorities of various localities. This went on week after week till, at the end of two months, two groups from the most stricken region had arrived with extremely important material, to be dealt with with the utmost urgency, and everyone was summoned to attend an extraordinary meeting the morning after.

I had to collect my delegation's passports from the Foreign Commissariat, but was told there that some hitch had occurred, and was requested to come back the next day, when the passports would be ready without fail. All this, as usual, involved some delay and when, at last, and rather late, I drove up to our meeting place, I was astonished to find a series of vans standing outside, and a number of young men—uncommonly like my friends from the Inner Prison—hurrying in and out of the building. My first impulse was instant and speedy retreat—but realising the futility of such an action, I went in and joined the fully assembled meeting in the large recreation hall.

A strange scene presented itself to my eyes: the meeting was silent—only the subdued muttering of rapid question and answer exchanged between members and more young men,

girthed with revolvers, and using scribbling pads for taking particulars of those present, was heard. Kameneff, the Chairman, behind a small table at the far end of the room, seemed to have just finished addressing the meeting and now sat there hunched forward and covering his face with his hands.

I was taking all this in when, after a few moments, at the opposite end of the room, a tense, high, old woman's voice said loudly, and in the unmistakable Petrograd upper-class manner of speech: "You refuse to arrest me? And pray, on what grounds? Am I, or am I not, a fully qualified member of this Committee?"

"But, Comrade Figner, how could you even suppose that we would . . ."—but the anxious reply, so subdued as to be hardly audible, was masterfully interrupted.

"Don't call me 'Comrade,' and be silent, please, and let me talk to Kameneff—and to think that scum of your breed should infect this land again!"

And then I saw, making her way with difficulty down the centre aisle, the superb figure of a very old lady, leaning on a stick and supported by one more of the old retainers, but erect and holding high her grey head with its emaciated, beautiful, aquiline features and blazing eyes.

I regret nothing more than to be unable, at this distance in time, to do justice to the blistering onslaught she delivered when she reached the Chairman's table: starting in a deceptive calm way, the suppressed fury at last broke through, covering in a torrent of abuse not only Comrade Kameneff and his brethren at the Politburo, but Vladimir Ilyich Lenin himself. The awestruck silence of all present, both captives and captors, lasted quite a few moments after she had slowly left the room . . .

This old lady was Vera Figner.

In 1880, Alexander II, the Liberator, was killed by one of two bombs thrown at his sledge by one Zheliabov, the head of

a gang of terrorists belonging to the extreme faction of the *Narodnia Volia*—People's Liberation Movement, which preceded the Social Revolutionaries of my day. With him six men and two women were condemned to death, but only one of these last suffered the penalty—the other being pregnant had her execution deferred, as the law demanded, until the birth of her child.

That woman was the old lady who had just left us. She had been in the end reprieved by the successor and son of her victim, and after many years as one of the few principal state prisoners kept in Schlusselfburg Fortress on the Neva, permitted to return for the rest of her life to her family's estate in the distant north-eastern province of Perm.

There were few Russians of my generation to whom, irrespective of their political allegiance, the names of those few Schlusselfburg prisoners were unknown: their indomitable struggle against any odds had made them forever legendary figures in the eyes of all. When I read over the lines I have just written I see how far they remove me from the present day, when both sides in the world struggle admit vengeance and extermination only, as retribution for low motives mutually and *a priori* taken for granted.

The show was over and we all were taken, in the Black Marias, to the Inner Prison. As I, the old hand, discovered to my surprise, this establishment had its own sorting depot inside its walls—for a superior brand of prisoners, I am glad to say. Here we from the Famine Committee spent two or three days, with a few distinguished outsiders added from time to time—people only remotely, if at all, connected with us. The régime was fairly free, and one had opportunity of renewing old connections, and exchanging views with people one had lost sight of for years.

Another ludicrous incident is perhaps worth recording here, the more so that, by a strange coincidence, it harks back again

to the death of the Emperor Liberator. Sent for, I appeared before the usual young men, three of them this time, puzzling over a galley proof in front of them. Next to me was seated a shy young man—a university teacher of history, and a Menshevik by creed.

The galley proof, handed to me for examination, was headed:

“ARTICLES OF THE SACRED COHORT OF BODY-GUARDS TO THE AUGUST PERSON OF HIS MAJESTY THE EMPEROR,”

With list of original members attached.

This list of members was headed by my uncle, Count P. P. Shuvalov, as Commander of the Cohort, and included amongst the names, all well known to me, that of my father. The articles were those of a counter-terrorist secret society founded by my uncle under the influence of the shock of the Emperor's assassination. The eventual activities of this aristocratic body were brief and, except that they interfered somewhat with those of the professionals, had no result whatever.

All this was, of old, well known to me, and later in prison led to most interesting talks on the subject with the young don, himself an active member of the Famine Committee. He had caused the whole incident by forgetting in his pocket a galley proof, the fruit of his researches into the old days of the revolutionary movement.

It took three hours, and the summoning of other history dons, of which there were a number amongst us, to convince our inquisitors that the whole thing was past history, and that I could not possibly have served in the cohort, having at the time not yet left my mother's breast.

At the final sorting out I was parted from the distinguished company I was with and, to my disgust, sent on foot—if you please—with a low mixture of all sorts of political riff-raff, back to the Butirsky Jail once more. The rest of the members of the

Famine Committee, after various terms of detention at the Inner Prison, were sent home with warnings to behave in future, except for the leading group of Co-operators and Zemstvo members, who were exiled and forbidden sojourn in the six largest cities, including the two capitals.

My reception at the Butirsky did a good deal to restore my feelings, ruffled by the indignity of having to appear there in such low company. At the reception desk, to begin with, the Chief Warder of Siberia, which I had left five months previously, greeted me with: "Hullo, old man, back from holiday—had a good time outside?" which was pleasant enough in itself. But the big surprise awaiting me at the Block Clerk's office was even better. The Block Clerk in charge, one of my old assistants, solemnly and without hesitation handed me the master key, thus relinquishing his post in my favour—a liberty he could permit himself in view of the eventual "kick in the pants" always at the disposal of our electorate.

I vented the remains of my bad temper by giving the worst possible accommodation to the crowd I had arrived with, and thereafter settled down to the well-known routine for another three months. They passed uneventfully and, just as I had begun vaguely to contemplate a little hunger strike of my own to remind those whom it concerned of my existence, I was released without, on the face of it, a stain on my character.

I have now come to the end of what could be termed an over-all impression of the inner workings of the State Security Service and life in some of its main places of detention. It might incline the reader to a much more favourable view of these institutions than they deserve. The reason for this is that my appreciation, so far as it goes, and in its implications, is based entirely on personal experiences.

This appreciation, therefore, leaves out a side of the Cheka's activities which, by all standards and at all times, must be considered a monstrous abuse of human authority.

I am referring to the manifestations of what was termed "Red Terror" by the Party itself.

Whenever an important counter-revolutionary terrorist act by an individual or organisation took place, such for example, as an attempt on the life of Lenin, the bomb thrown into the full session of the Moscow Soviet, or the killing of Kirov, then the Chairman of the Leningrad soviet, a certain number of people were taken from their prisons and shot without trial or any other formality.

Sometimes the numbers would be small, sometimes large, sometimes confined to a special category—say Social Revolutionaries or Army and Naval officers—sometimes again the central institutions alone took action, followed by the provincial branches which, however, could also act on their own initiative. It was as if an ordinarily reasonable body of men trying to cope with a state of general disorder and chaos was seized by a mad frenzy of self-protection.

I discussed this whole problem and every aspect of it with every party member I met, and with some of them my relations were such that criticism of their own party was by no means withheld. I found that in calm periods with the great majority condemnation—I am sure sincere—was just as unqualified as my own. And yet this did not prevent the same people from defending "red terror" when, however rarely, its results were officially published.

The arguments they half-heartedly used were that in time of revolution "white terror", with its extreme cruelty and ruthlessness, cannot fail to produce "red terror" in retaliation. They contended that the official announcements which followed acts of "red terror" were designed not to give them official sanction, but to limit their spread by checking the mad impulse. However unconvincing all these speculations may be, of one thing I feel certain: the "red terror" during the days I am entitled to speak about never was an avowed policy or an

established official practice, but was brought about each time by the security organs getting out of hand.

When all is said and done it was this quality of spontaneous pathological impulse, together with the absence of a fixed theoretical basis for this horrible practice, that characterises "red terror" as one of the evils inherent in a revolution. It is in no way comparable to National Socialism's bland racial persecution planned in its unspeakable degradation as one of the cornerstones of that régime's foundations.

I can certainly say for myself and, I think, all Russians who loyally served in those days, that while we could just tolerate working for a government unable to restrain outburst of "red terror," we would not have done so and would certainly have felt obliged to go over to active and violent opposition, had the Soviet Government consciously anticipated the German method in any guise whatsoever.

CHAPTER VIII

RETURN TO CIVIL LIFE

IT was in the course of a long conversation with my chief, Behrens, that it became fairly obvious to us both that my clearance by the Cheka did not imply that no stigma at all was left on me, or that henceforward I could return to the position in which the previous staff screening had left me. The holding of a responsible post like mine by a marked man was extremely undesirable: if only for the reason that urgent and productive work would be sorely hampered by being sandwiched between stays of unpredictable lengths in the Cheka prisons.

He thought that under the circumstances, a temporary—say a year or two's—disappearance from inevitable scrutiny was the only remedy for this situation. Therefore, after a contemplated post as Admiralty Librarian had been rejected as not obscure enough, and after a week spent transferring my department to my successor, I was put on the Reserve List, which virtually meant a return to civil life.

This happened on 29th July, 1922, or exactly three years and two months after I had been mobilised into the Red Navy.

In spite of the fact that those were the days of N.E.P.—the New Economic Policy—which meant a partial return to private enterprise and a free market, it was still essential to find a job or profession to guard against the dangers of free-lancing on the black market—in those days the only other choice available.

Here at last my beloved flute came in and, answering both the necessities of the moment and my lifelong desire, I became a professional musician, both in theory and official status and later even in fact.

As I mentioned before, I had become intimate with the composer N. Miaskovsky and his circle. Of these many were connected with the Moscow Conservatoire—with the one at Leningrad two of the most renowned schools of music in the world. This led to my getting wind of a remarkable scheme, the child of the fertile brain of Professor Zeitlin, a violinist of great distinction, orchestral leader of unsurpassed experience and leading teacher of his instrument.

Having played under all well-known conductors, Zeitlin questioned the necessity of a body of experienced players being led by these gentlemen at the performance itself: he contended that a well rehearsed orchestra, having got the hang of the eventual interpretation of a work at the rehearsals, could on the day not only do quite well without a conductor but even improve the final quality of the performance.

His main argument ran thus: "Have you ever heard" he used to say "of a dramatic performance during which the producer runs about and gives the actors continuous directions? This not only with regard to the parts as spoken, but to the tempo and expressivity alike? Yet, where is the difference? Actors learn their parts, are rehearsed by the producer and then perform by themselves. Why is it then that musicians are not allowed to do the same? The more so as they have the advantage of having their parts and therefore even need no prompter. The musical score gives more and subtler indications of how it should be performed than the book of a play, and these every orchestral player ought to be able to interpret. Conductors ought to follow the producers' example . . . and leave their players to themselves at the performance."

Zeitlin insisted that in these days of fully trained executants

the only rôle left to the conductor on the podium was interpretation of the work to the audience by gestures—a state of affairs which, though profoundly engrained in the minds of the public, could and should be overcome. Another of his arguments was that the gestures of the conductor, moderating or increasing sound, must necessarily come too late: something had to be wrong first for the conductor to hear and then try to correct. All that was necessary for this new way of performing, were more rehearsals than usual and the placing of the players in such a way that all the principals and leaders could catch each other's eyes—as in chamber music.

Whatever the merits of Zeitlin's theory, the fact is that the idea found immediate and enthusiastic support amongst the cream of the State Theatre orchestras—nearly all their principals and leaders being at the same time teachers at the Conservatoire.

A co-operative society called "The First Conductorless Symphonic Ensemble"—for short "Persimfans"—was created, and a series of concerts at the Grand Hall of the Conservatoire decided upon at the first general meeting. Now in those days of renewed possibilities for private enterprise, a certain capital for initial expenses was necessary, and this was where I came in, as I was able to provide it. The sum required going nominally into millions of roubles was in reality only the equivalent of £10 to £15 in gold, all that remained from a black-market sale of a cigarette case.

To characterise the value of money in those days: a concert harp, of one of the best makes and in perfect condition—it is still in constant use in England to-day—changed hands for 40 pounds of salt, 4 yards of cloth, 15 yards of silk tissue, and 1 million roubles in currency of the day. The money, which at pre-revolutionary values represented about 18 gold roubles or just under £2 sterling was an insignificant item in the transaction.

I was elected to the Board of Directors of the Persimfans, which had Zeitlin as Chairman, and permitted to take the part of third flute in those rare works where composers have included that number in their score, unmindful of W. A. Mozart's opinion of the depressing effect such a prodigality of flutes has on the ears of the listener.

More than sufficient distinguished players and a large number of advanced pupils of the Conservatoire volunteered to give as much time to rehearsals as required and the large symphonic orchestra came into being. How those players worked—ten hours a day sometimes, and nearly all their leisure were devoted to this collective enterprise from which, after all, no financial reward was expected. To anticipate: from the first concert a tremendous hit was scored with the Moscow public. A comprehensive selection from a classical, romantic and contemporary repertoire was performed: always adequate, it was often of outstanding merit, and soloists—both instrumentalists and singers—freely admitted that no better accompaniment could be devised.

One of the keystones of conductorless playing was the disposition of the musicians on the platform. To the audience the orchestra presented an unusual sight: upstage the backs of all the first and second violins were seen in a half-moon, while the sides of the circle held the violas and the cellos, with the double basses closing it backstage and facing the audience. The woodwind and brass formed a hollow square inside this circle, facing each other, with the percussion in a group in front of the double basses. Such a disposition was essential as it provided for all leaders and most of the players seeing each other, and at the same time not losing sight of Zeitlin—the leading first violin in the centre of the front segment upstage.

For Zeitlin's original assumption that a conductor would "produce" his own interpretation during the rehearsals never came to fruition. It was the indefatigable Zeitlin himself who

“produced” from beginning to end all the programmes of that first series of concerts.

I myself—a shaky player at all times—and entirely inexperienced in orchestral work, had some extremely disconcerting moments, and on the whole was rather comforted by the fact that very few parts had to be entrusted to me.

There was, in particular, the morning when Persimfans was rehearsing an excerpt from *Tristan*. The three flutes scored had just entered a long drawn chord in the lower register, of which I had the lowest note. The first violins facing us, with Zeitlin in the middle not a yard away, were playing a fast-moving figuration in accompaniment, when I heard Zeitlin’s voice, muttering to himself, while continuing to scrape away busily on his own fiddle: “What a dreadful G flat. What a *horrible G flat* . . .” Of course, the G flat was mine—my own ear had been warning me that this was so, but the confirmation by Zeitlin’s mutterings was too much for me and the triad had to carry on without it, Wagner or no Wagner!

But I was by no means alone in my discomfiture: our side-drummer, for example, an ancient, meek little man, who had been wielding his sticks for at least half a century, could not get right a certain rhythmical figure in Rimsky-Korsakov’s “*Scherherezade*”. The orchestra had been stopped half a dozen times when the plaintive voice of the old boy became audible: “But, Mr. Zeitlin, it was Alexander Sergeech (Rimsky Korsakov) himself who taught me to play as I do . . .”

However, all such, and many more, small mortifications overcome, it was always a most impressive moment when at a performance, the slight preliminary knock of Zeitlin’s bow produced a tense silence of sometimes up to a hundred players, which the audience would join. Yet only a few of these would notice, a few seconds later, his bow raised a few inches brought down again—and the music come forth as if started by magic.

It was also well worth while to watch the soloists—the

singers and violinists upright, and the pianists sitting sideways to the audience—dominating, from a raised smaller platform in the centre, the crowd of players encircling them below. They were accompanied with uncanny precision, always supported but never obscured, if only for the simple reason that if they had been the orchestra could not have followed them.

It was at one of Persimfans' first rehearsals that it happened—one fine morning in the Grand Hall of the Conservatoire at Moscow.

It was early and I was sitting about in the front row of the stalls with various other members of the Board, having just finished our business, while above us on the platform, the whole orchestra tuned and gossiped as usual. "The Dukas seems to be off to-day—why is that?" a voice queried from the platform. "So it is" Zeitlin answered, "we have no harp—Mariusia won't be back till tomorrow—she is making hay of them in Leningrad, and was delayed."

I don't know why—just out of idle curiosity I suppose—I asked: "Who is Mariusia?" A chorus of astonished, somewhat indignant voices answered: "You don't know Mariusia? What you have never seen The Incomparable? . . . I wish I had the same pleasant surprise in store." and a solemn voice summed up: "Wait till you see the eminent professor, Maria Lucianovna Korchinska, the youngest member of the faculty of the Conservatoire."

Rather bewildered, I let the matter rest for the time being. Next morning—same people, same setting—the sun from time to time casting shafts through the haze of cigarette smoke which rose to the top lights of the Grand Hall. Suddenly a commotion back stage, voices "Ah, here you are, Mariusia." "Greetings, Maria Lucianovna." "Now we are complete at last." And there she was, in a white blouse and dark skirt, a sunbeam spot-

lighting her, poised tall and erect on the edge of the platform. And, while listening to Zeitlin's: "Maria Lucianovna, let me introduce our new member . . ." she, looking me over with her intent, curious and a trifle bold gaze, proffered her hand and, leaning on mine, lightly jumped down to our level—the vision of Euterpe incarnate had become human again.

I fell and remained prostrate, in spirit at least, till aeons later, when stumbling over my inert form, she, perhaps to her own surprise, said "yes."

Meanwhile, the fact that many eminent composers had discovered the affinity between harp and flute drew us together. It so happened one day, that sitting on a window sill during a pause in the current rehearsal, she asked me: "Do you happen to know that Debussy has recently written a sonata for flute, viola and harp?" And on my affirmative, continued: "I propose to include it in my next recital, but I'm afraid that X (our second flute) is not certain he can manage the date. Would you, by any chance, care to understudy for him?" Stunned, and immensely flattered, I was, of course, entirely at her service.

And so it came about one night, two months or so later, that Miss Marie Korchinska, the eminent harpist, Vadim Borisovsky, now the viola player of the Stradivarius quartet, famous all over Soviet Russia, but then a young player just out of school, and I, at over forty, and for the first time taking a responsible part of no mean difficulty in a contemporary work, took our seats before one of the most exacting audiences imaginable, including not only almost the entire staff of the Conservatoire, but every composer and writer on music then present in Moscow.

Our harpist still remembers, with a shudder, the two green faces to her right and left, and her anxiety, while playing the six spread notes which lead into the flute's entry in the very first bar of Debussy's incomparable work.

But all went fairly well—we finished together, as they say,

without a hitch. The musical dons were even kind to my performance, though not without a shade of condescension. And thus was marked my entry into the profession as a chamber music player.

The harrowing discomfort of this performance was made more than worthwhile by the sense of a new purpose and aim in life. Other concerts followed, as modern chamber music works came to the fore in which the flute had a part, either in conjunction with the harp, or other instruments—and it did not take long before I felt established in the profession.

My lifelong craving to get into closer touch with the world of music was also amply satisfied by my admission at that time to the circle of Basil Lamm, the learned editor of the original version of Mussorgsky's "Boris." Of an evening, mostly after a notable concert or performance at Moscow's three Opera Houses, people would drop in to Lamm's flat at the Conservatoire (he was a teacher and the librarian of that establishment), and sometimes stay to all hours, discussing over tea, every possible aspect of their art with such vigour that sometimes neighbours gave signs of restlessness.

Not only Moscow's musical world—composers, critics and performers—but also most guest conductors and artists from abroad, especially those who had visited Moscow before, did not fail to call at Lamm's hospitable flat. Sometimes when a passionate argument, especially on modern music, was in progress, one or more of the artists present would snatch up their instruments and give a vivid illustration of the point they were trying to prove.

It struck me, even at the time, how Moscow's musical structure though admittedly firmly and splendidly rooted in the intellectual life of the town, had not only been left unscathed and entirely undisturbed by the events outside, but was able to keep in touch and absorb progress in music the world over, as if nothing at all had happened since the pre-war years.

The truly super-national substance of art has, I think, seldom been better illustrated and confirmed than at Lamm's flat in Moscow's Conservatoire in 1922.

Life, though organised, was entirely satisfactory, both in its present and its prospects, the more so since the eminent professor of the harp had become my wife. But what with communications with England fairly regular by now, I began to feel a longing to see my mother and sister again after nearly eight years of separation. About that time I was informed that, owing to some curious freak of English law, the lease of the house occupied by the Russian Embassy in London, having been signed by my father while he was Ambassador, was now my mother's property as his heir. As my mother was anxious to resolve this anomalous position, and the Soviet Government quite prepared and willing to take over the lease, I was able to arrange for myself through Dr. Joffé, now Soviet Ambassador to the Court of St. James a visit to England, so as to be able to act for my mother in this transfer.

This fulfilled all my wishes beyond my fondest hopes, and in late July, 1923, I made my way by sea from Libau to London. I found my mother and my sister, since 1911 Mrs. Jasper Ridley, firmly established at a quarter-mile's distance from each other in what was then a very rural part of East Anglia. The dry continental climate, they contended, suited them. I found also that two firms, Messrs. Ransome and Jefferies and Messrs. Fison, Packard & Prentice, were close by: for years Sosnofka had been their customer and a very satisfied one at that.

Was it because of the fact that changes at home were so drastic as to bear no comparison that I found very little change in England on this first visit, except for one terrible discovery: I had virtually no friends left of my age—they had all been

claimed by the war. The result was that during the few weeks this preliminary visit lasted I saw few, and then only the most intimate, of my old friends: the more so as most of them had hardly recovered from the losses the war had caused them.

But Maurice Baring was still about and in and out of Lime Kiln—as my mother's new home was called—and my mother already at it with a newly established crew of henchmen something of Sosnofka seemed to have migrated into British shores.

On the other hand, there seemed to be possibilities in the idea of giving my wife's art the wider scope it certainly deserved, and so with the full and eager consent of my mother, it was decided that an attempt should be made for us both to come out of Russia and see what could be done about this. I hastened back to find to my delight that a daughter had been born to me on the 8th of September, 1923. I would have no need, perhaps, to mention this event in such detail but for the fact that this female child, christened Nathalie, has now become the young woman without whose indefatigable, stubborn and, I regret to say, stern collaboration these reminiscences would, under no circumstances whatsoever, have seen the light of day.

About a year later—the interval being occupied mostly by scraping together the necessary visas and permits—a distinguished harpist, having obtained leave of absence from her Conservatoire, and well equipped with two harps and one flautist but somewhat impeded by a daughter, left for what was supposed to be a world concert tour but proved to be for all of them a parting for ever from their native land.

LIME KILN,
CLAYDON.

Sept./Jan. 1952-3.

THE END

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